US009425532B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Endo et al.

(10) **Patent No.: US 9,425,532 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: Aug. 23, 2016**

(54) **CONNECTOR TERMINAL**

(71) Applicant: **DAI-ICHI SEIKO CO., LTD.**, Kyoto (JP)

(72) Inventors: **Takayoshi Endo**, Shizuoka (JP); **Sakai Yagi**, Shizuoka (JP); **Shuji Touno**, Shizuoka (JP); **Hiroyuki Kurita**, Shizuoka (JP)

(73) Assignee: **DAI-ICHI SEIKO CO., LTD.** (JP)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **14/961,818**

(22) Filed: **Dec. 7, 2015**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2016/0172778 A1 Jun. 16, 2016

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Dec. 12, 2014 (JP) 2014-252494

(51) **Int. Cl.**
H01R 13/42 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***H01R 13/42*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H01R 13/17
USPC 439/852, 853, 862, 851
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,357,066	A *	11/1982	Cairns	H01R 12/721 439/595
5,271,740	A *	12/1993	Endo	H01R 12/57 439/260
5,660,569	A *	8/1997	Yamada	H01R 13/115 428/209
5,735,717	A *	4/1998	Nabeshima	H01R 13/113 439/851
6,019,646	A *	2/2000	Okamura	H01R 13/113 439/748
6,186,837	B1	2/2001	Abe	439/748
2002/0009918	A1	1/2002	Banas et al.	439/404
2002/0077002	A1 *	6/2002	Harasawa	H01R 13/2442 439/862
2003/0220015	A1 *	11/2003	Ishiyama	H01R 13/187 439/595
2005/0009390	A1	1/2005	Barker et al.	439/188
2010/0041283	A1 *	2/2010	Hernandez	H01R 13/113 439/851
2014/0357097	A1 *	12/2014	Endo	H01R 12/72 439/59

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

JP	H07037265	8/1995
JP	H0935825	2/1997
JP	H113739	1/1999
JP	2598581	6/1999
JP	2002075558	3/2002
JP	2005085649	3/2005
JP	2007521181	8/2007
JP	2011216439	10/2011

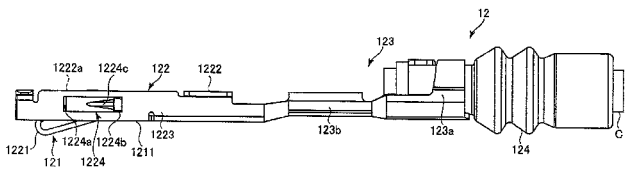
* cited by examiner

Primary Examiner — Tulsidas C Patel
Assistant Examiner — Marcus Harcum
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Hayes Soloway P.C.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A connector terminal includes: a terminal body operable to be inserted into a terminal space formed in a housing; and an elastic contact piece arranged in the terminal body. The terminal body includes: a bottom wall possessing an opening; and a top wall facing the bottom wall away therefrom. The elastic contact piece includes: a first end fixed to the bottom wall; a second end abutting on the top wall; and a U-shaped folded portion. When the terminal body is inserted into the terminal space, the folded portion runs onto a raised portion, a part of the elastic contact piece moves out of the opening, and the second end abuts on the bottom wall.

10 Claims, 32 Drawing Sheets



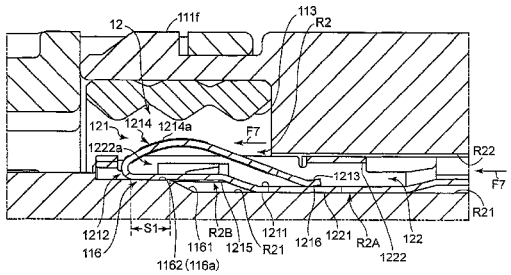


FIG. 1

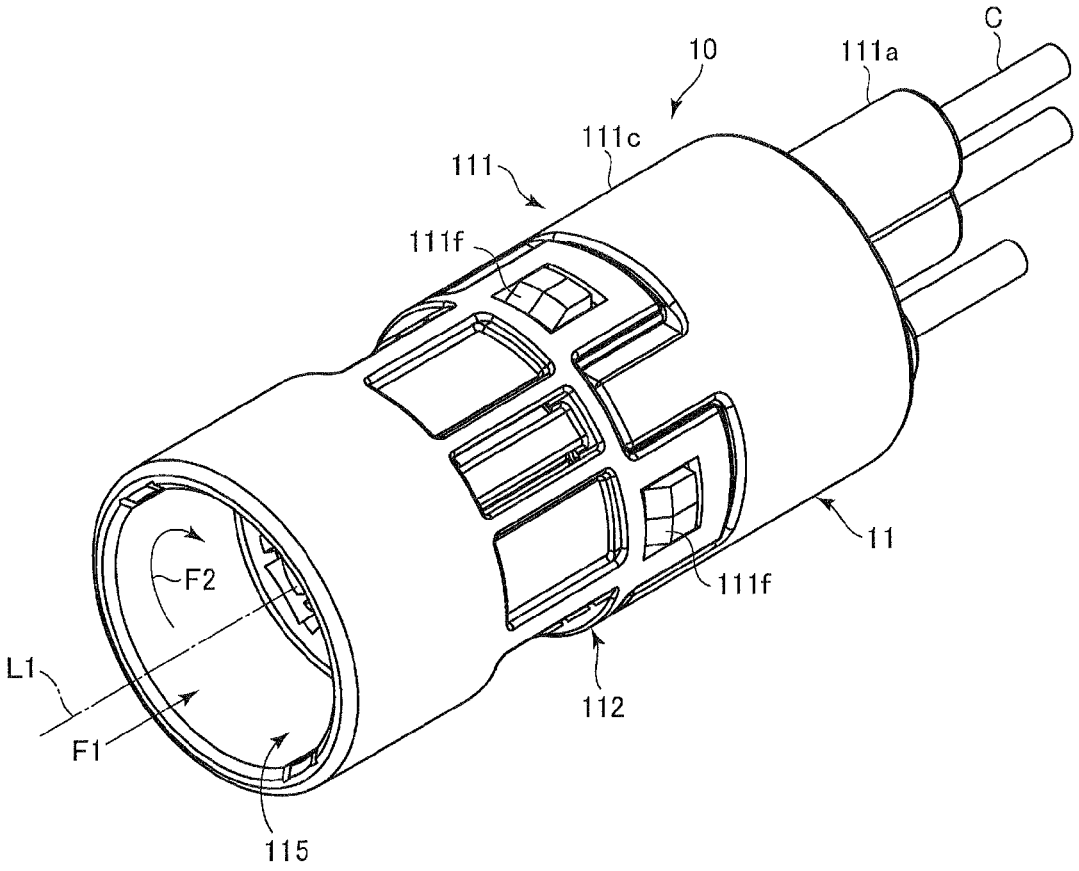


FIG. 2

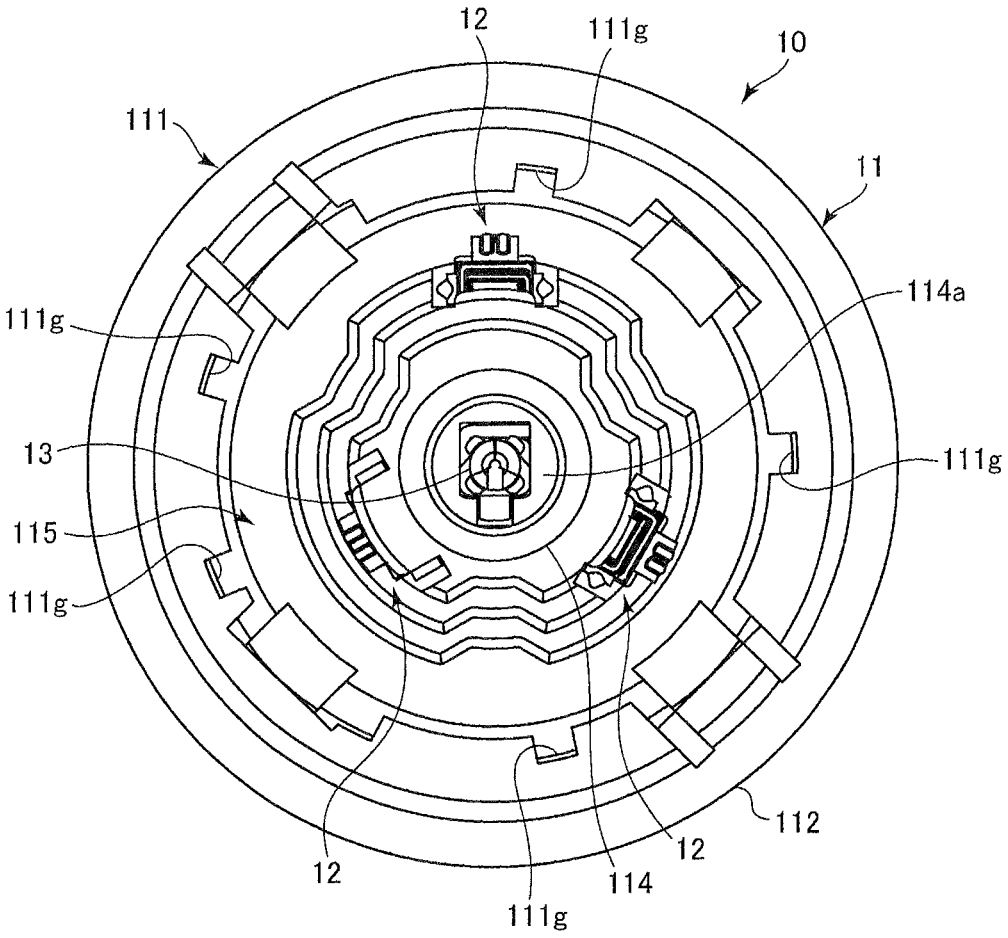


FIG. 3

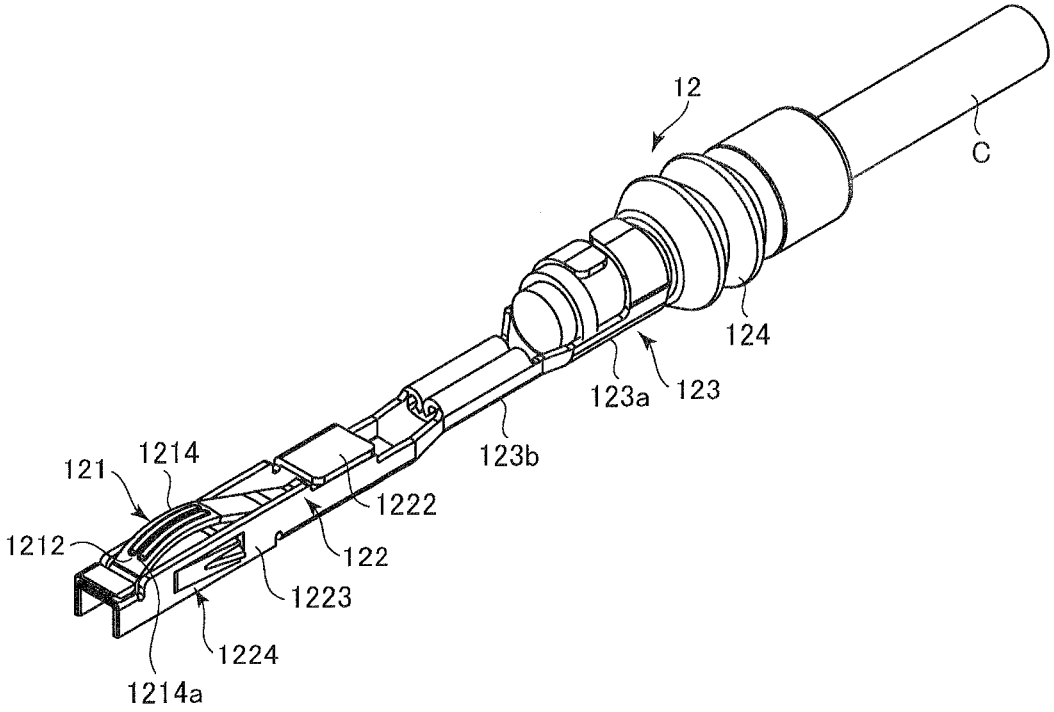


FIG. 4

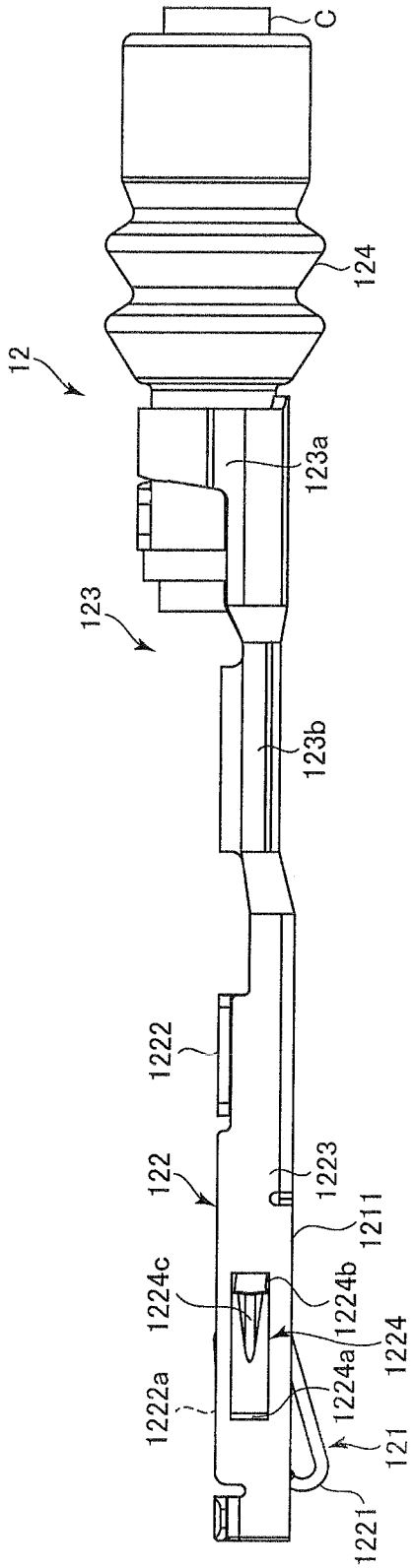

C
124
12
123a
123
123b
1222
122
1223
1211
1224c
1224b
1224
1224a
1222a
121
1221

FIG. 5

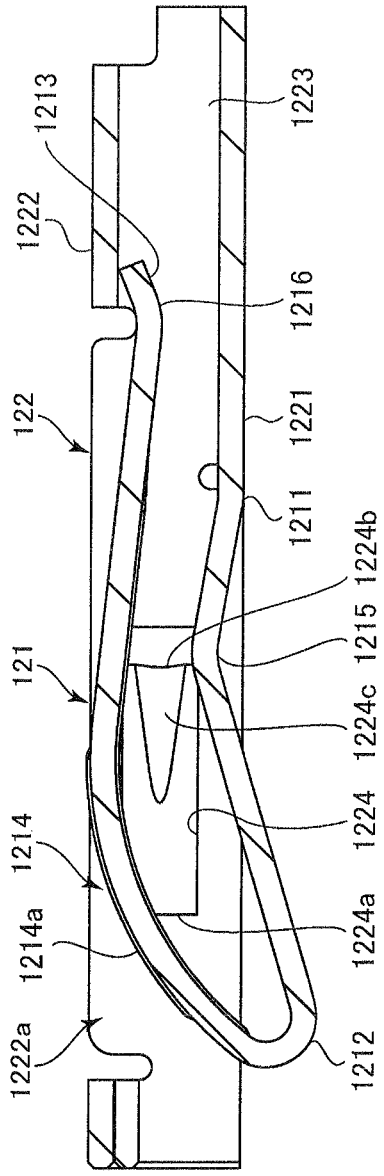

1213
1223
1222
1216
122
1221
1211
1224b
1215
121
1224c
1224
1214
1224a
1214a
1222a
1212

FIG. 6

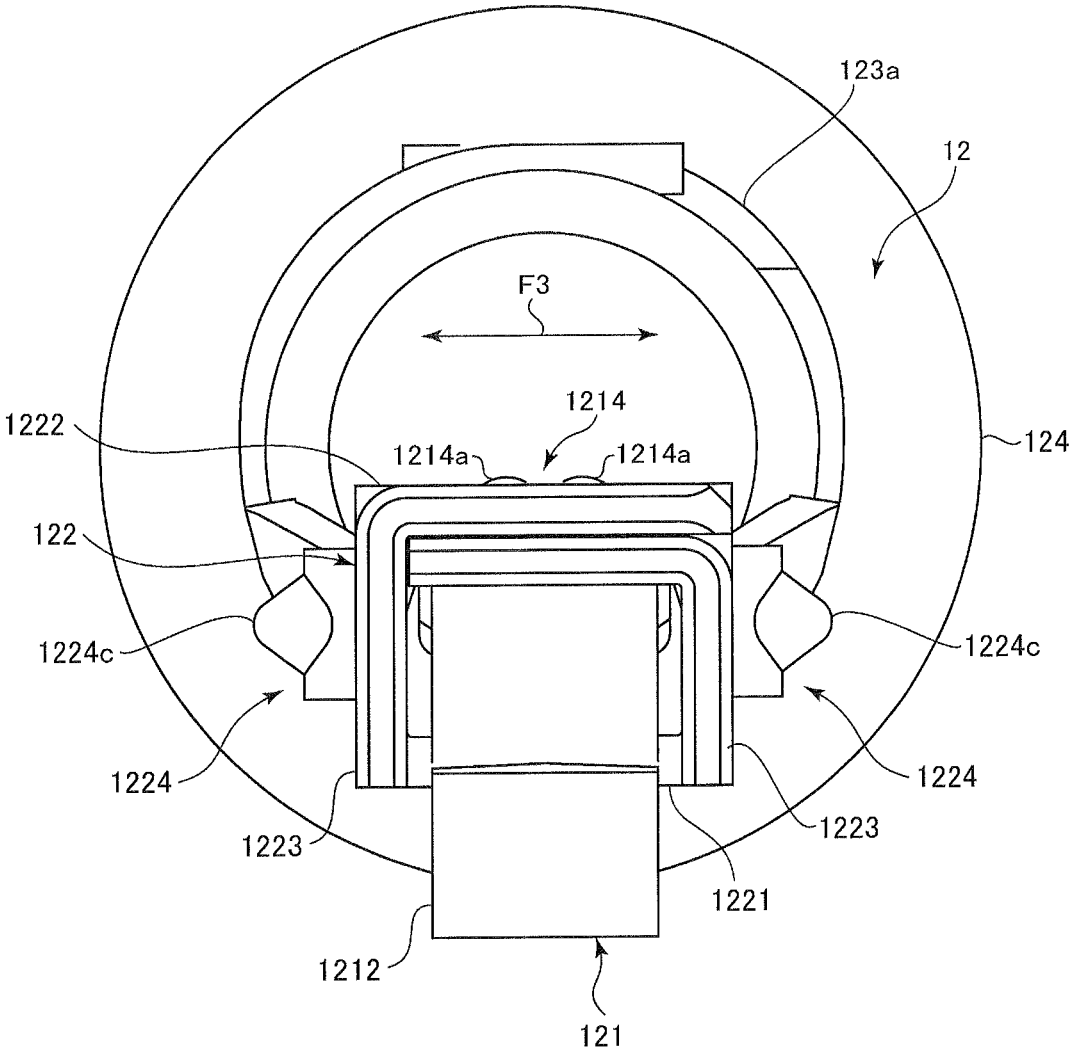

123a
12
F3
1214
1222
1214a
1214a
124
122
1224c
1224c
1224
1224
1223
1223
1221
1212
121

FIG. 7

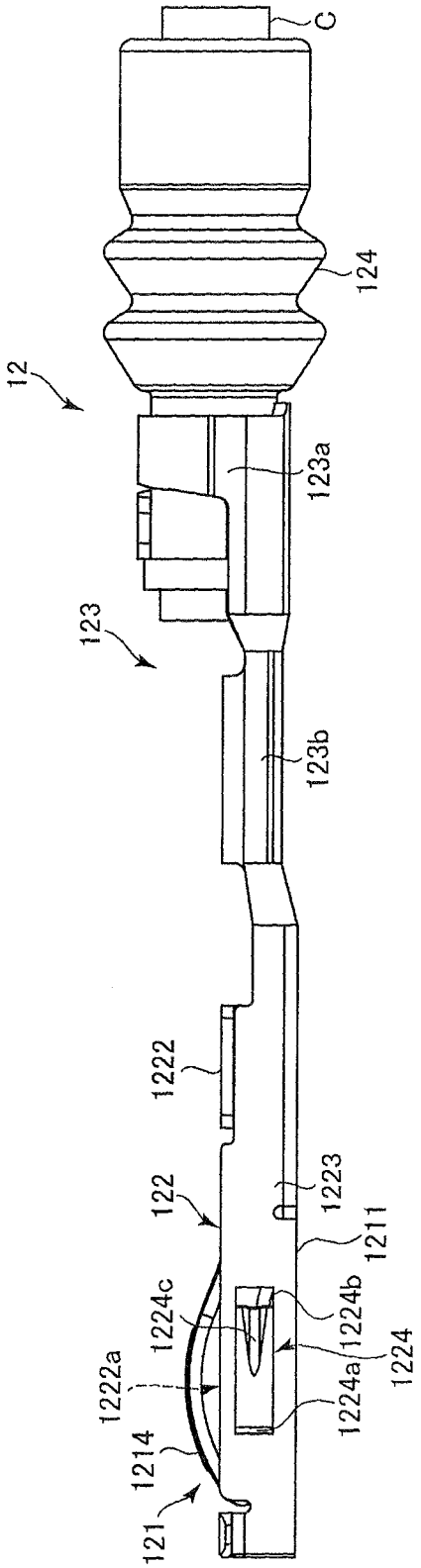

C
124
12
123a
123
123b
1222
122
1223
1211
1224c
1224b
1224
1222a
1224a
1214
121

FIG. 8

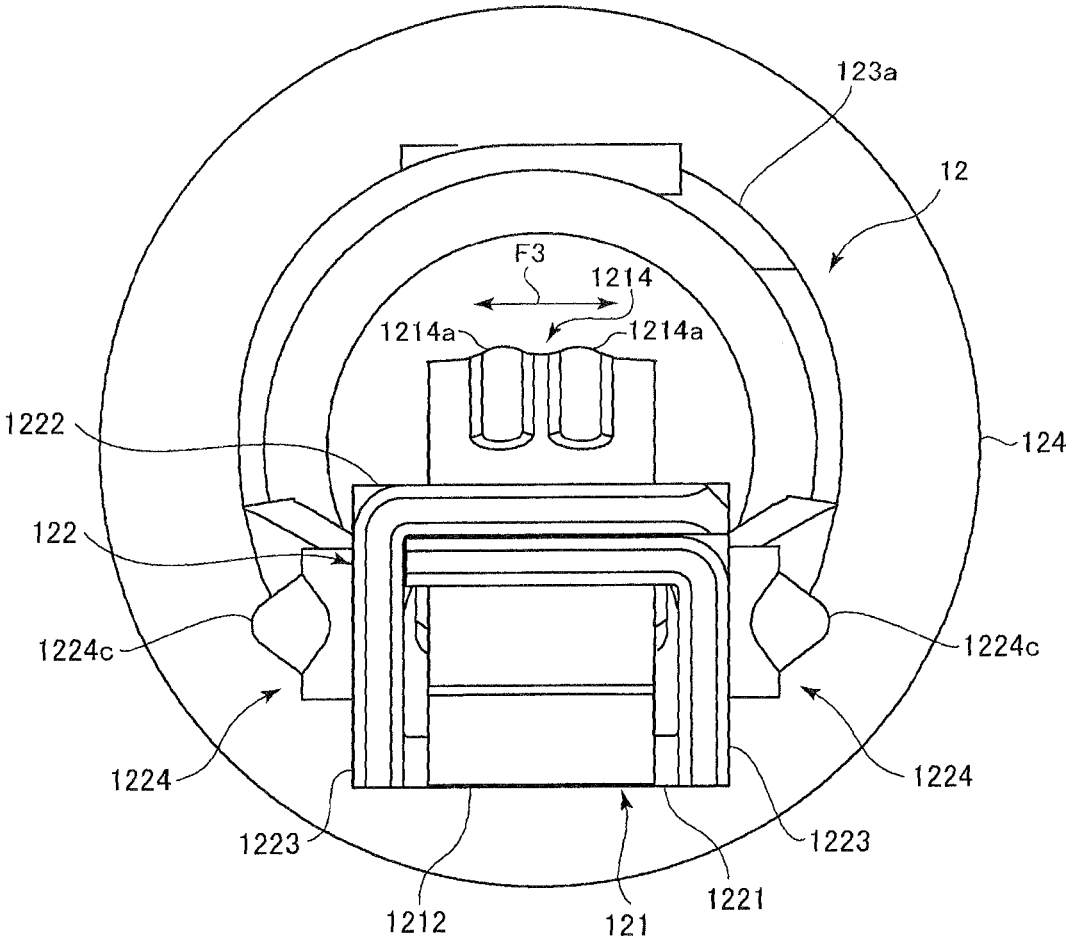

123a
12
F3
1214
1214a
1214a
1222
124
122
1224c
1224c
1224
1224
1223
1223
1212
121
1221

FIG. 9

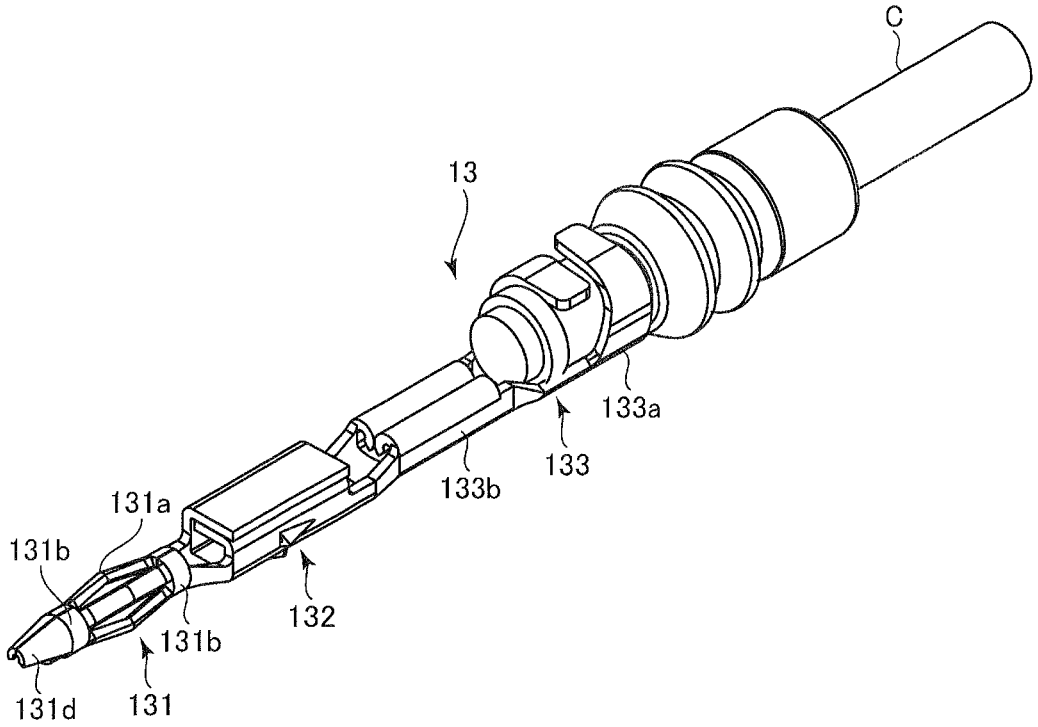


FIG. 10

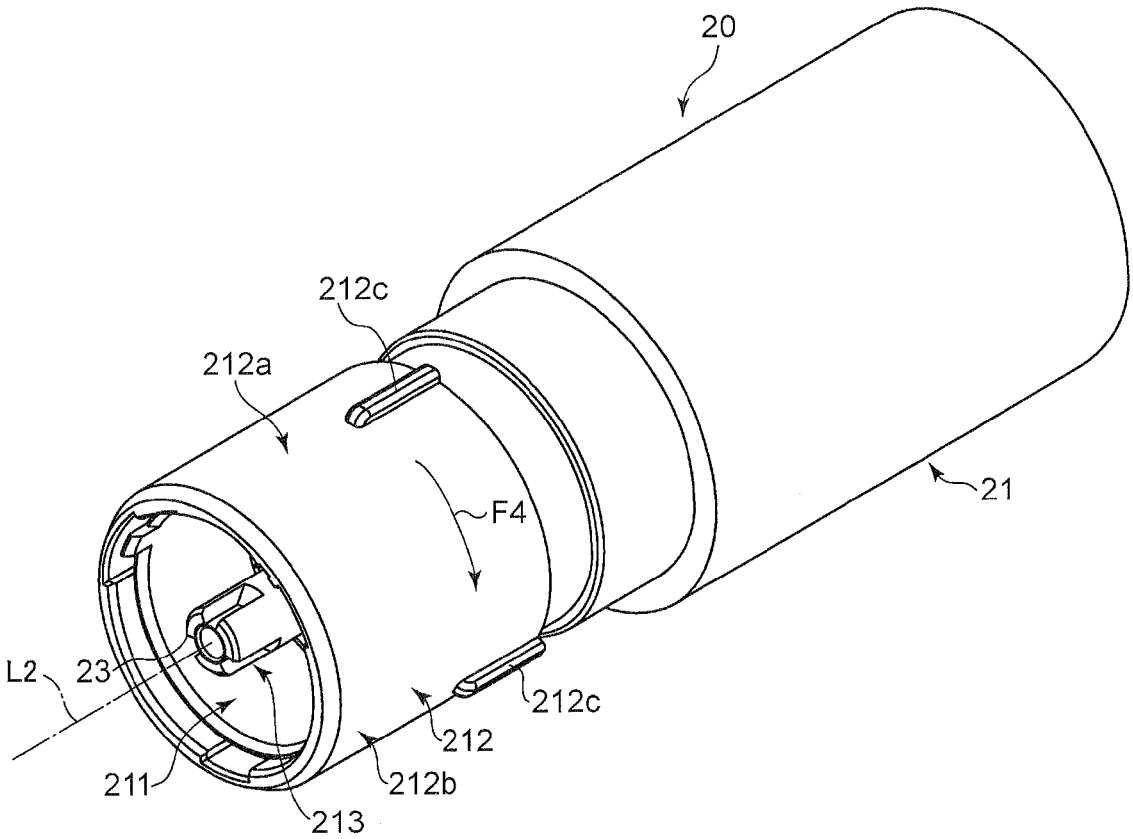
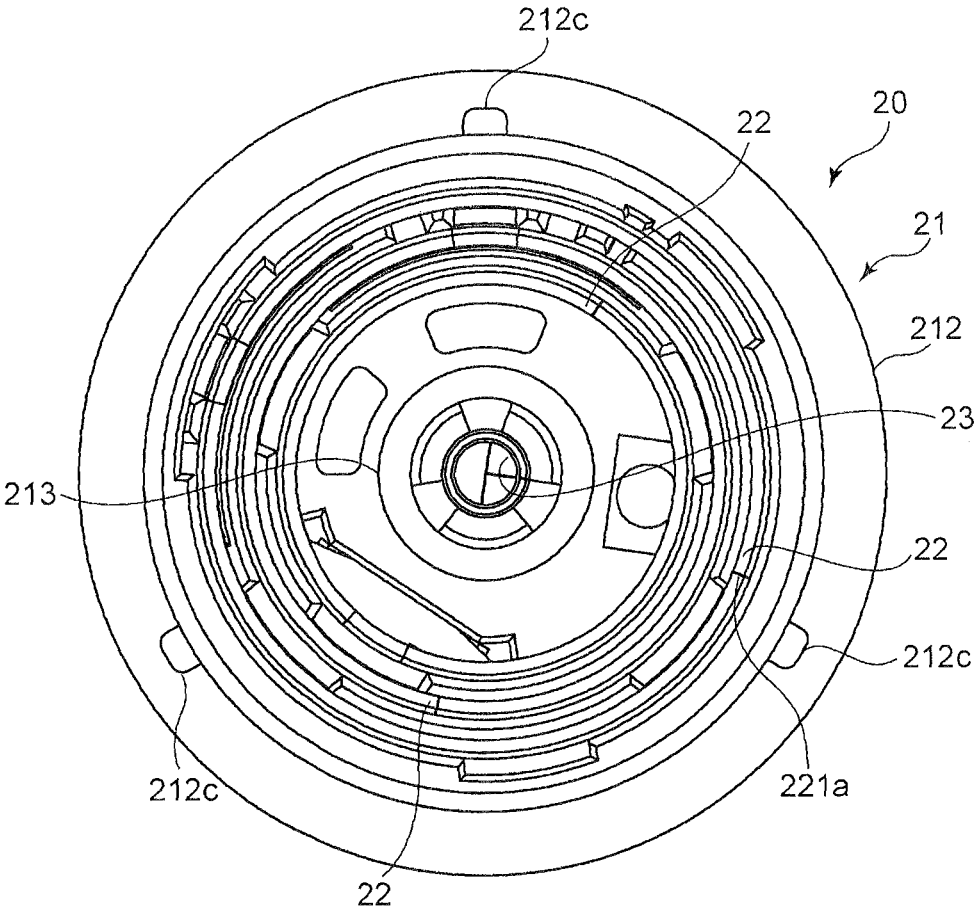


FIG. 11



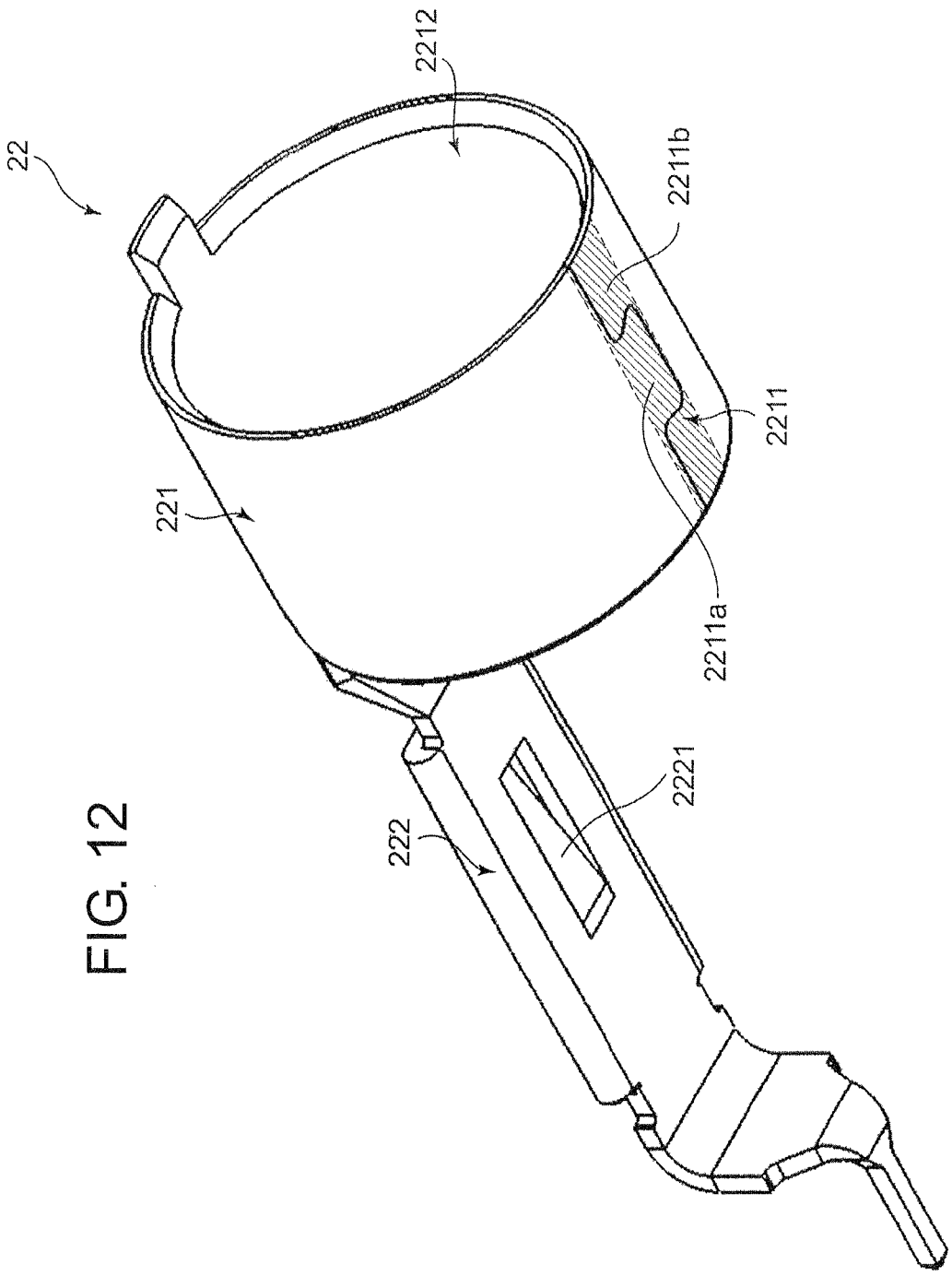


FIG. 12

FIG. 13

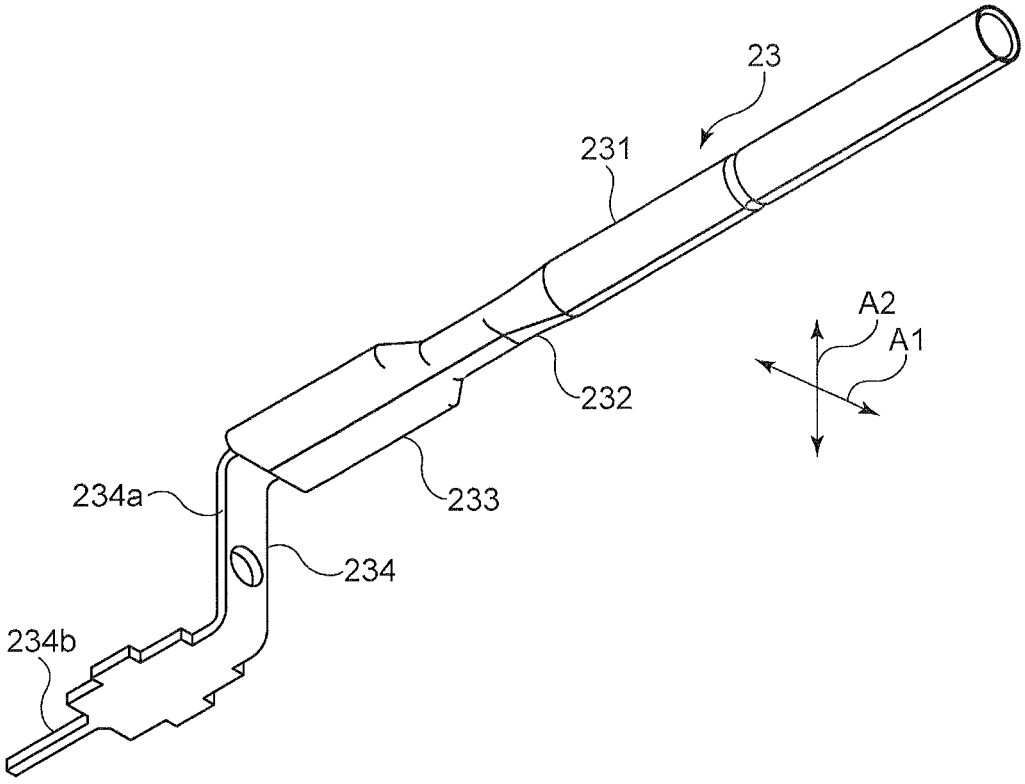


FIG. 14

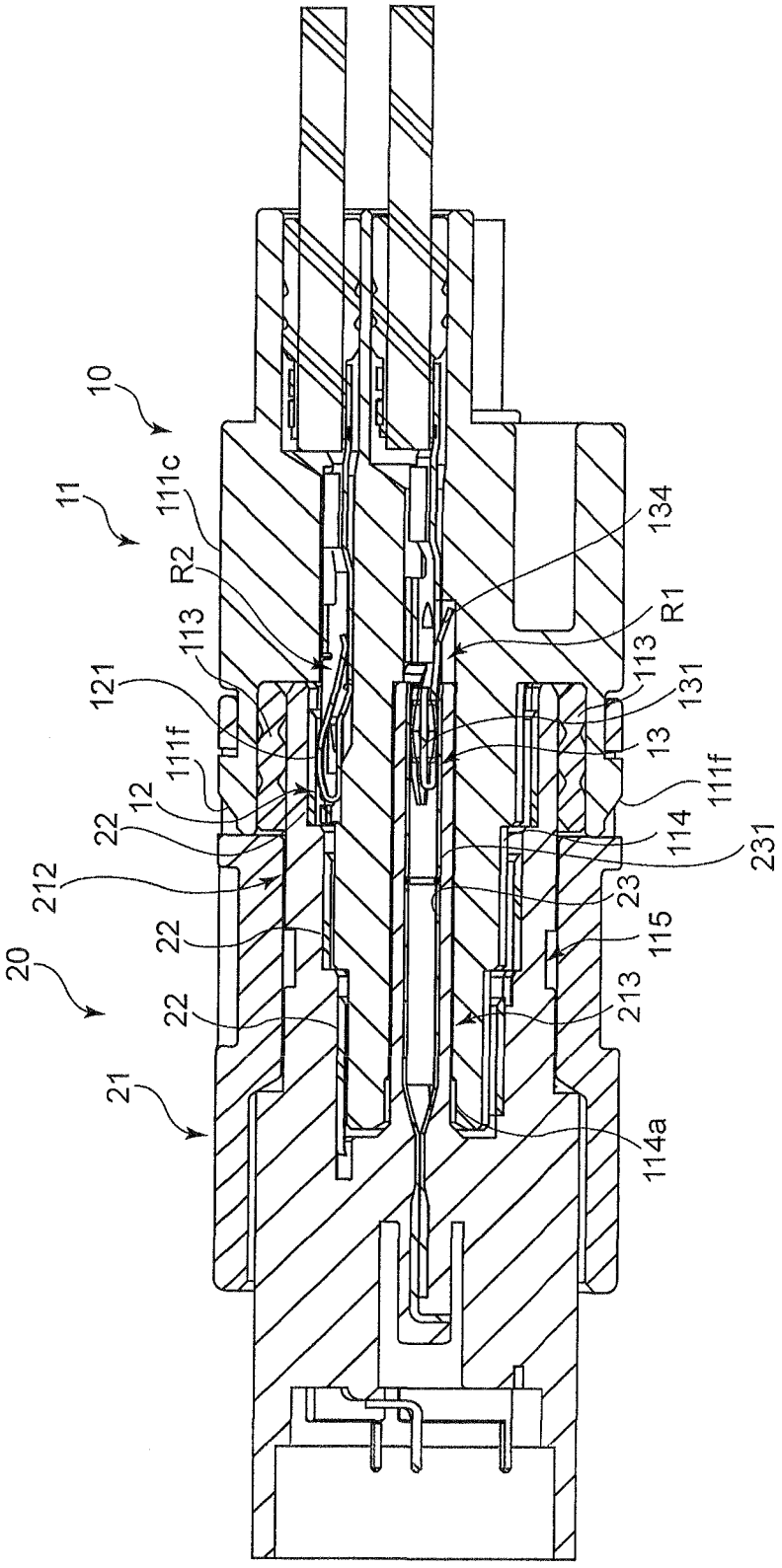

10
11
111c
R2
113
121
111f
12
22
212
22
20
22
21
114a
213
115
23
231
114
111f
13
131
113
R1
134

FIG. 15

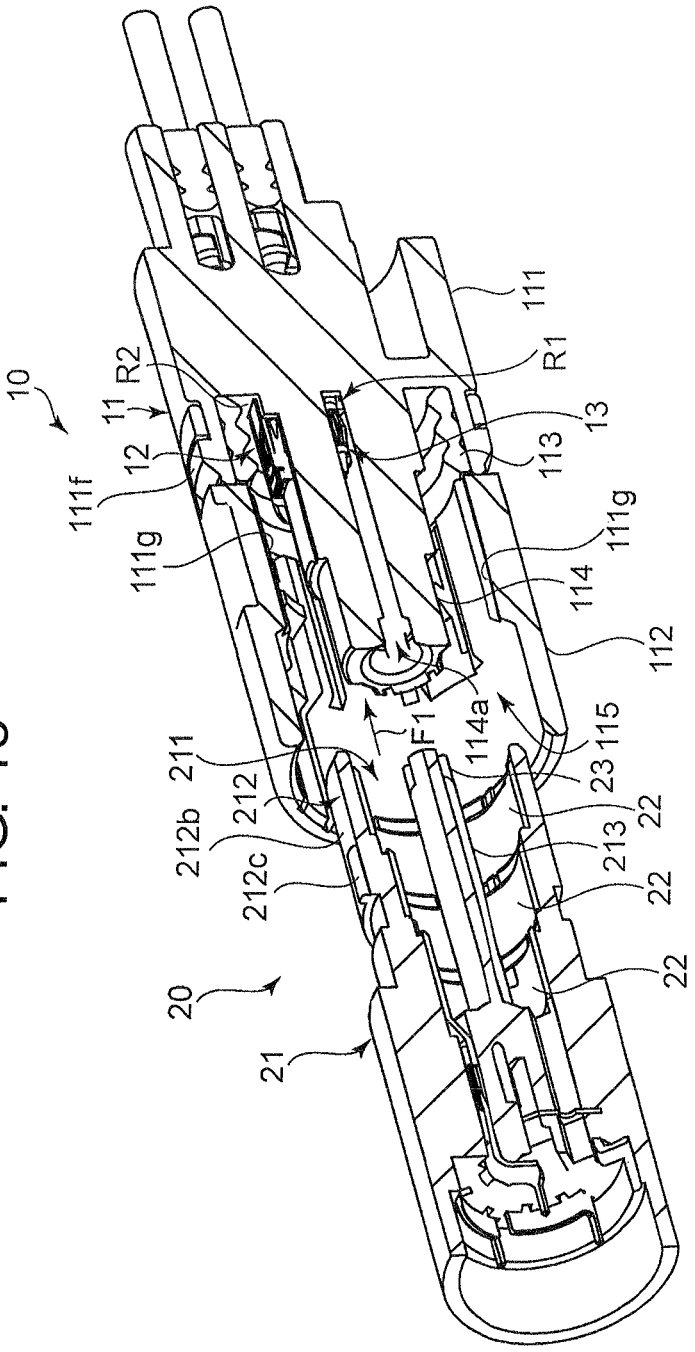

10
11
R2
12
111f
111g
111
R1
13
113
111g
114
112
F1
114a
115
23
22
211
212
212b
212c
213
22
22
20
21

FIG. 16

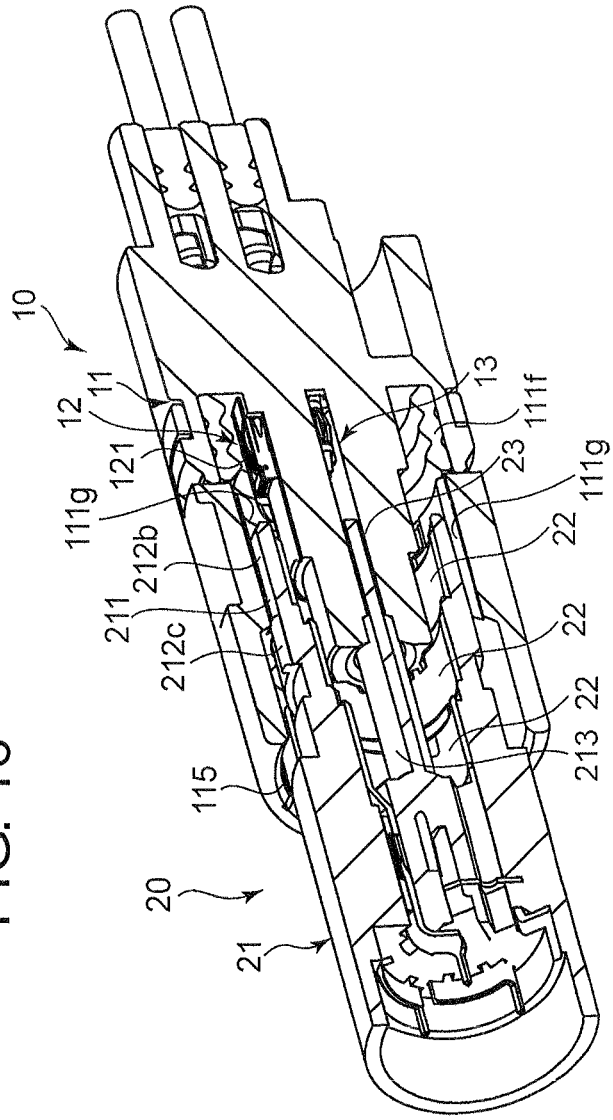

10
11
12
121
111g
212b
211
212c
115
20
21
13
111f
23
111g
22
22
22
213

FIG. 17

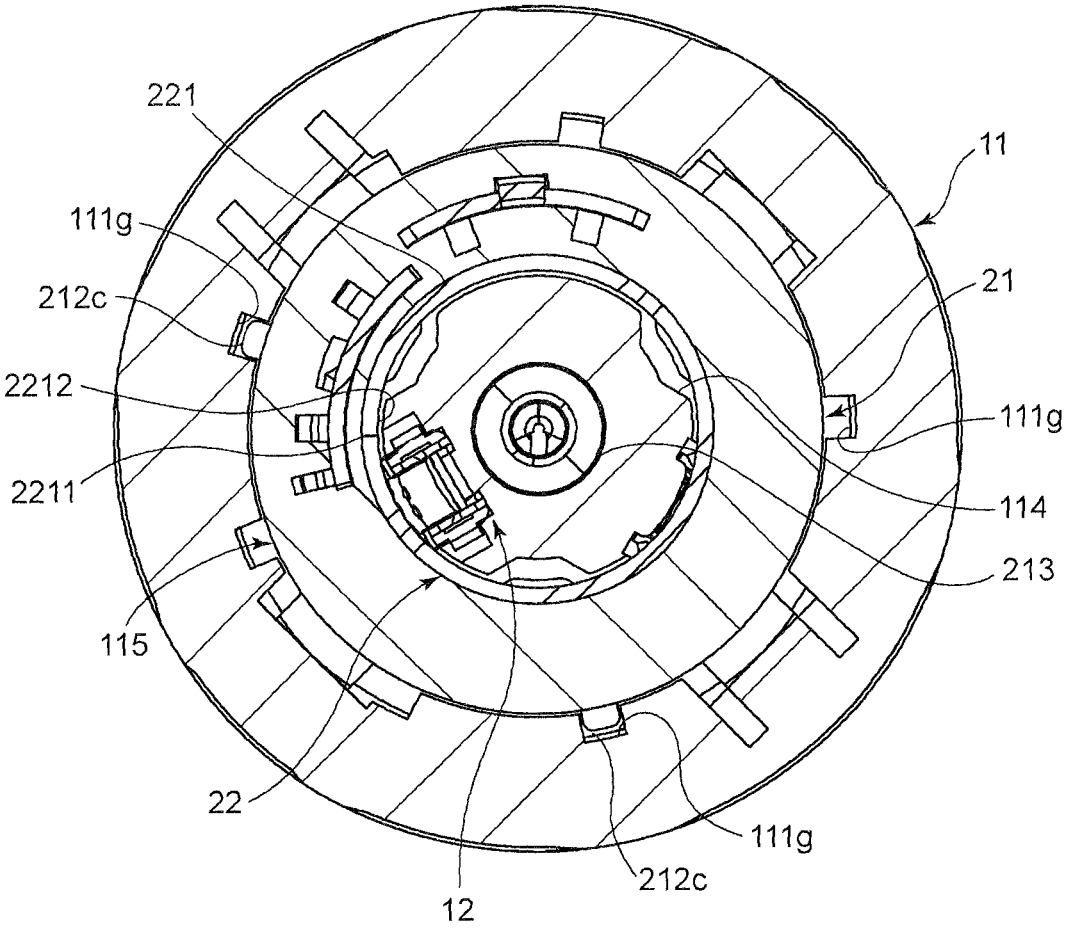


FIG. 18

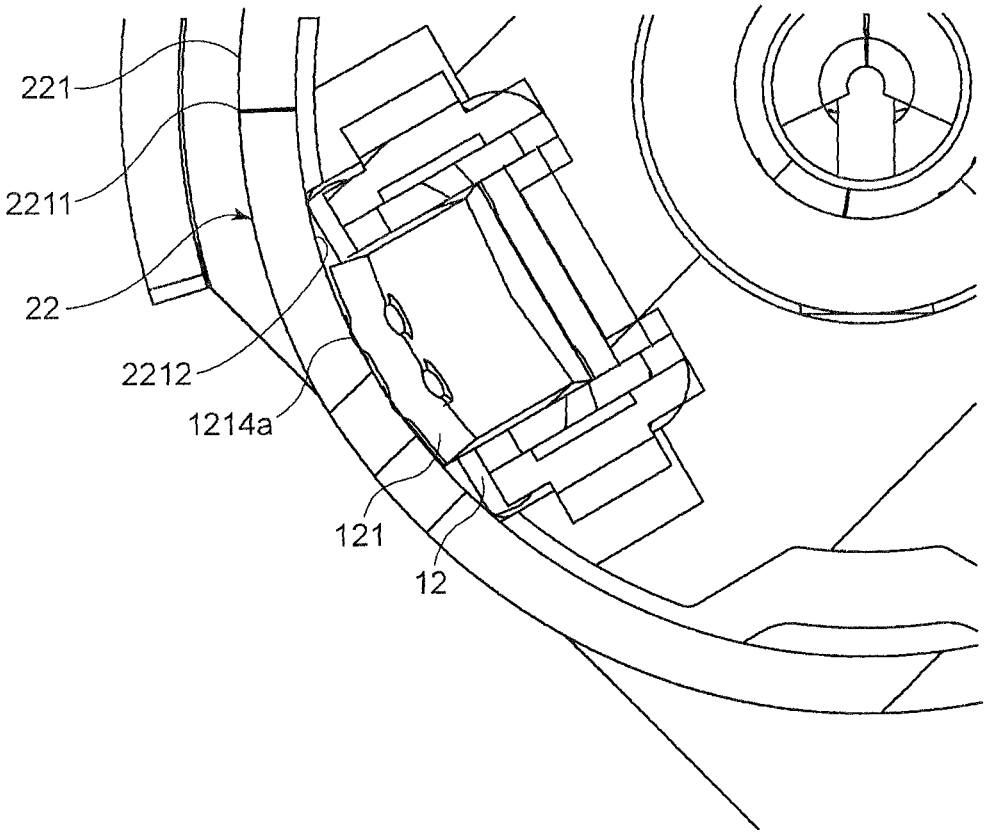


FIG. 19

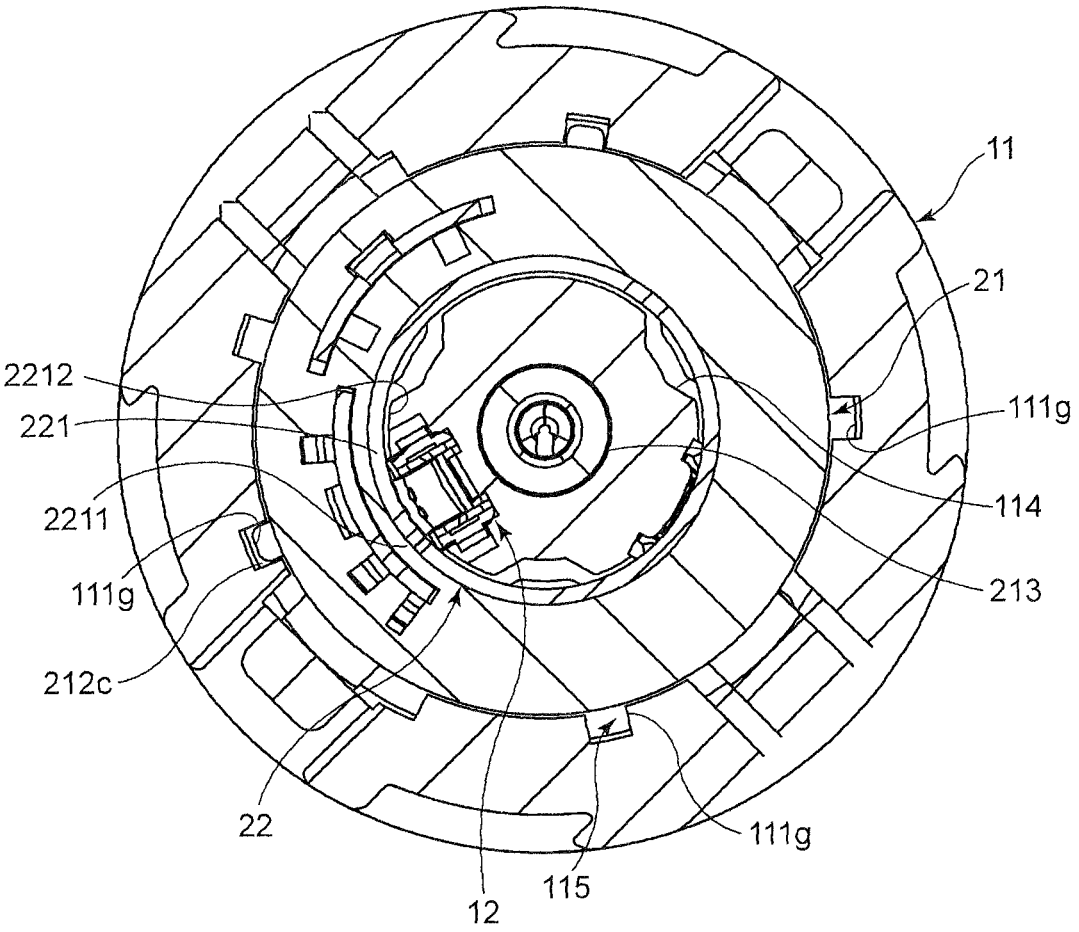


FIG. 20

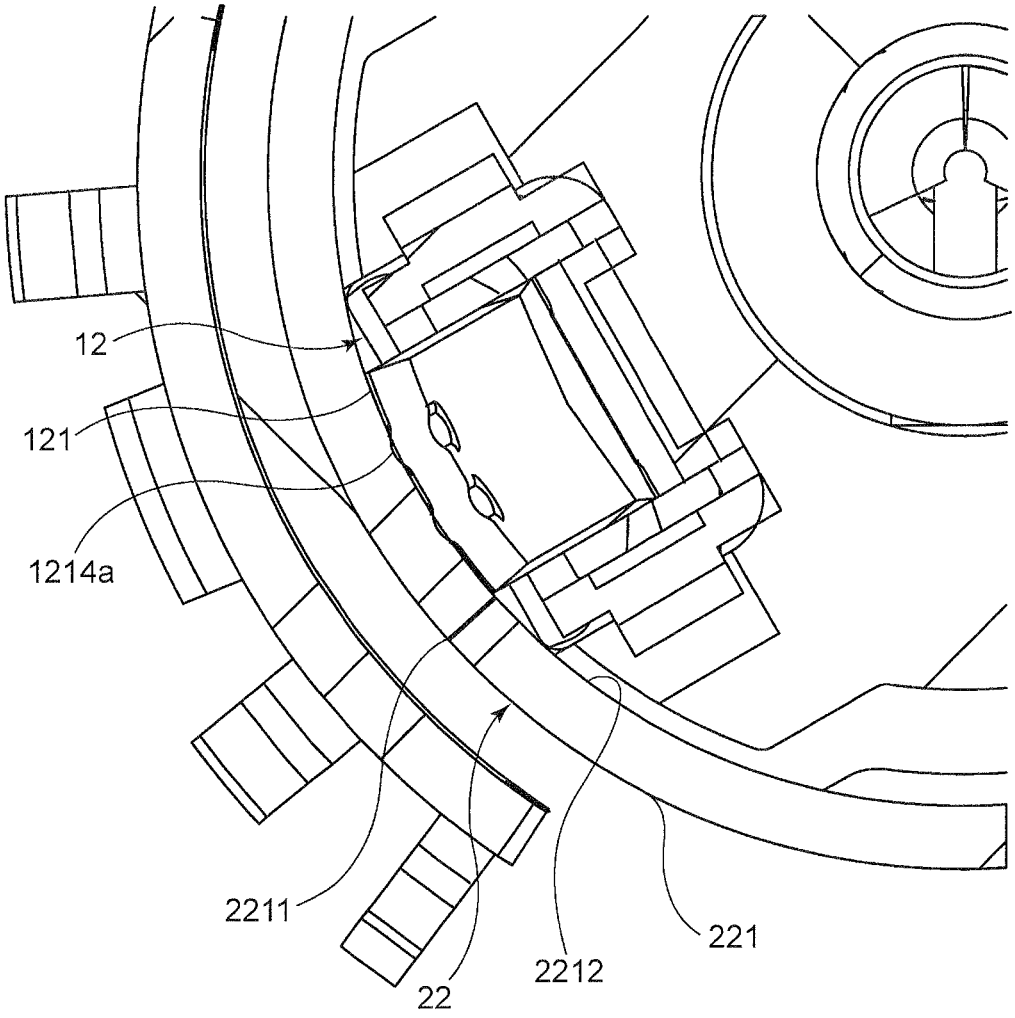


FIG. 21

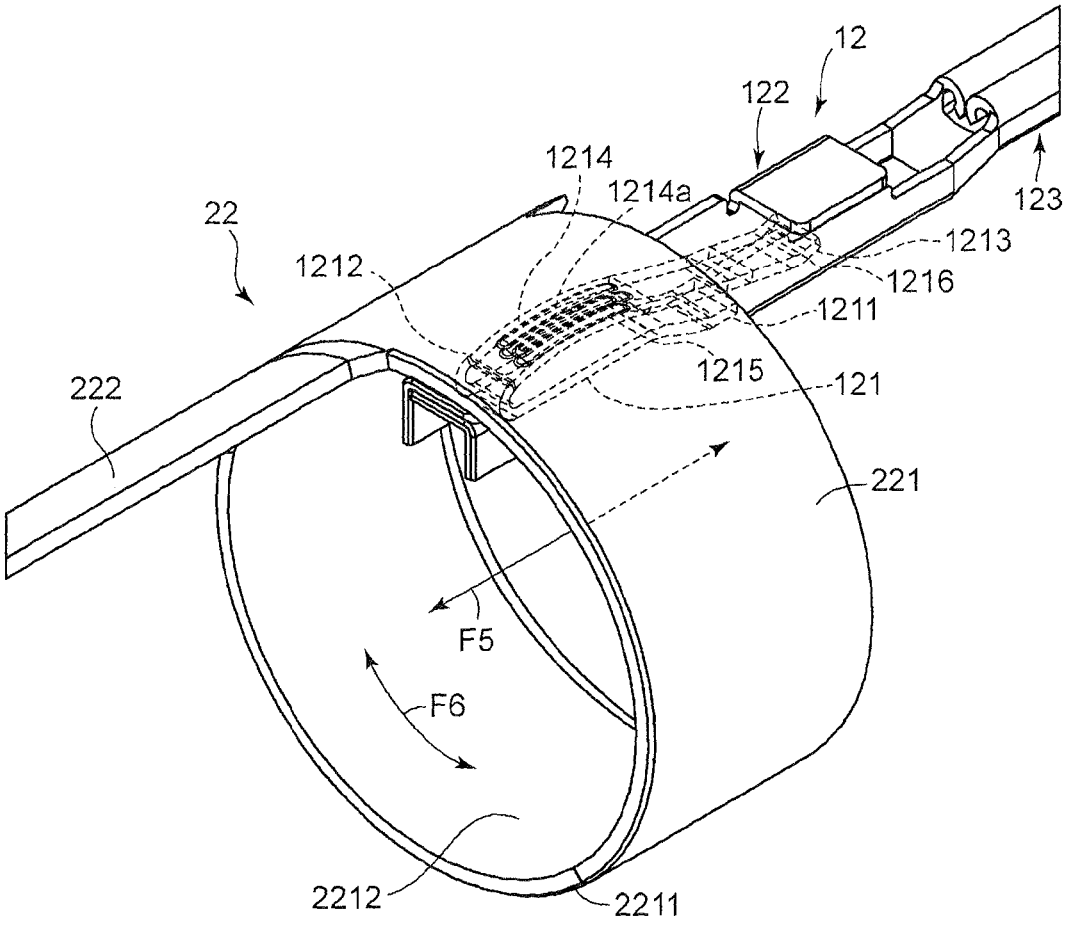

12
122
123
1214
1214a
22
1213
1212
1216
1211
1215
121
222
221
F5
F6
2212
2211

FIG. 22

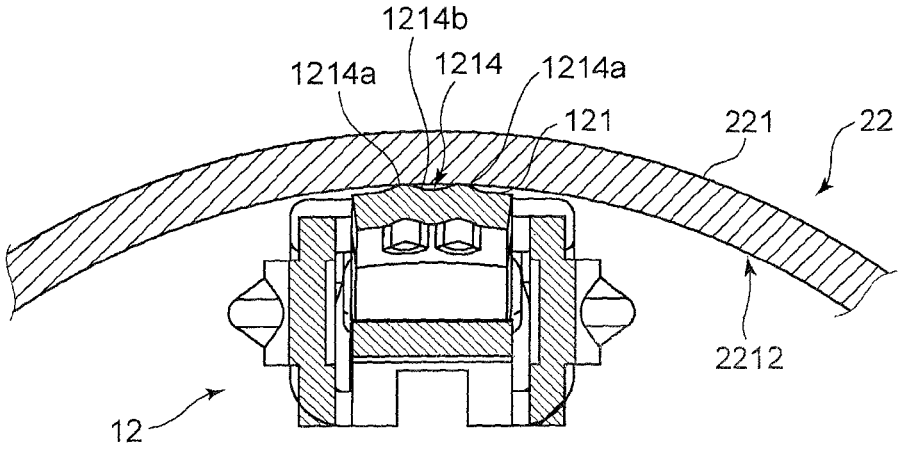

1214b
1214a
1214
1214a
121
221
22
2212
12

FIG. 23A

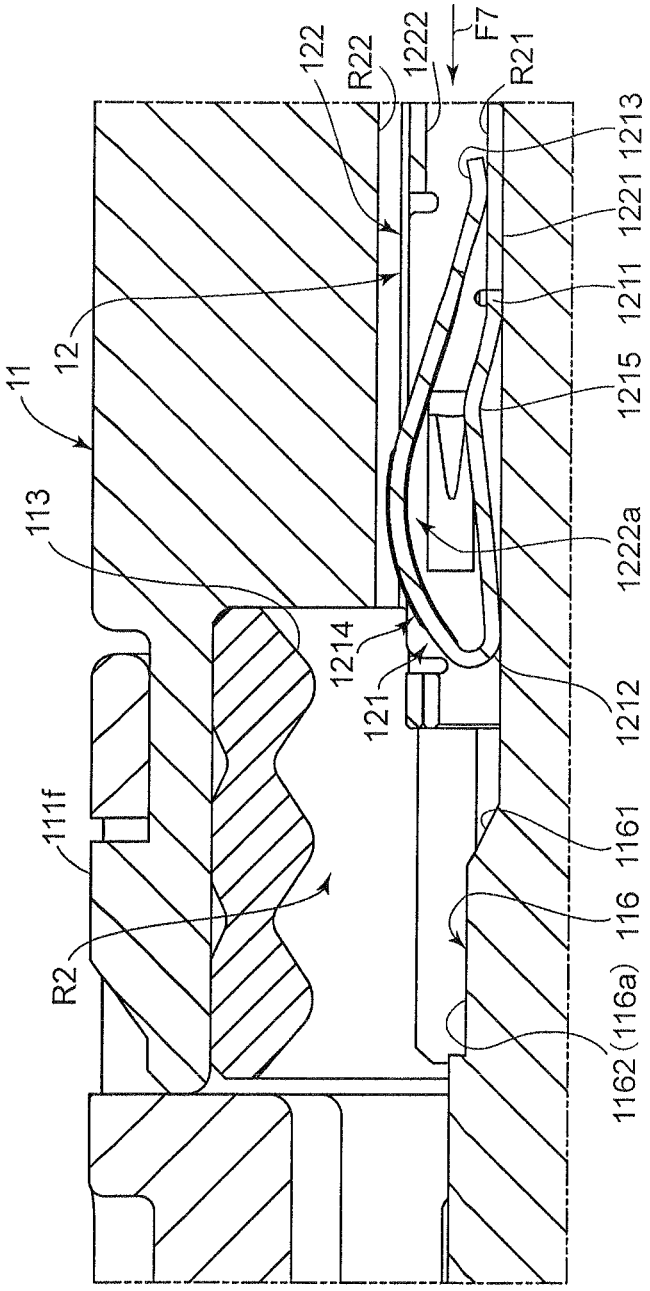

122
R22
1222
F7
R21
1213
1221
1211
1215
1222a
1212
1161
116
1162 (116a)
11
12
113
1214
121
111f
R2

FIG. 23B

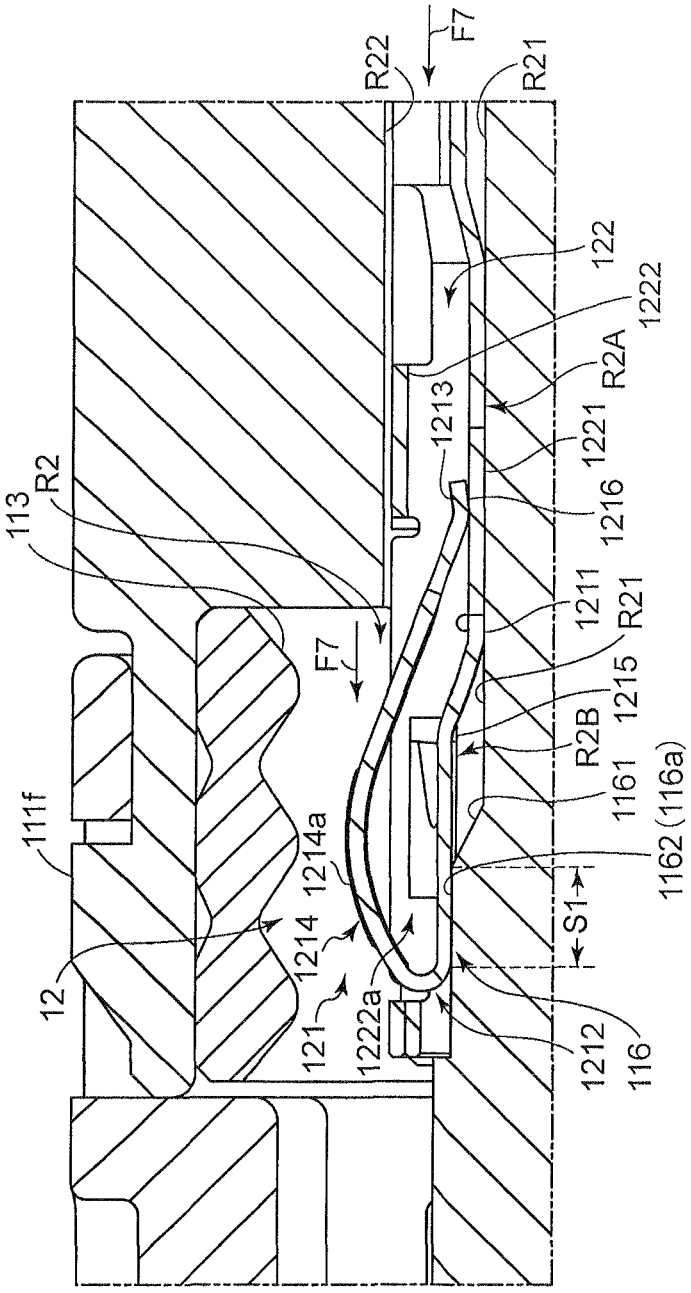

R22
F7
R21
122
1222
R2A
1213
1221
1216
113
R2
1211
R21
F7
1215
R2B
1161
1162 (116a)
111f
1214a
S1
1214
12
121
1222a
1212
116

FIG. 24

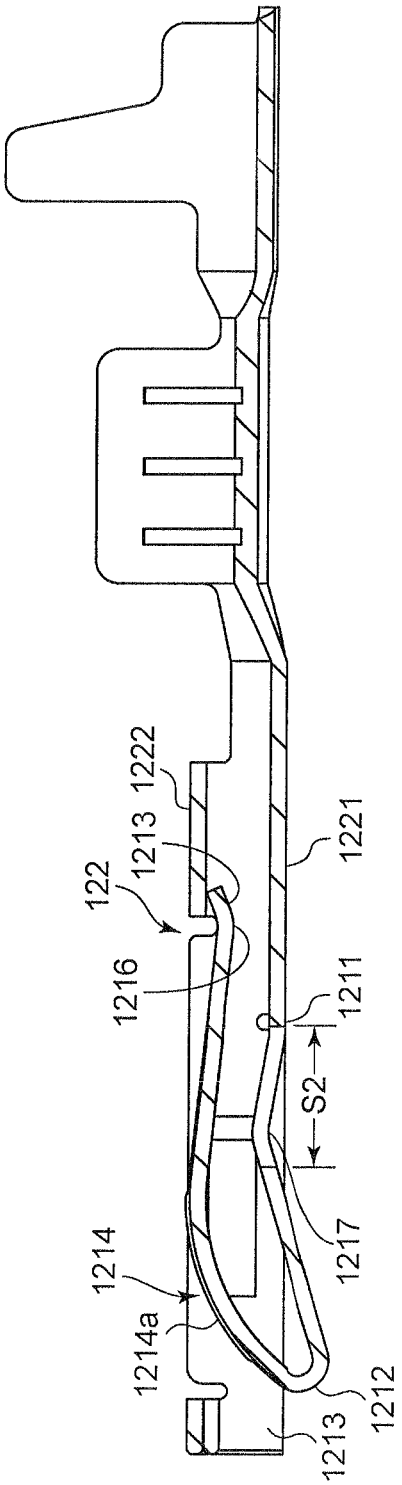


FIG. 25

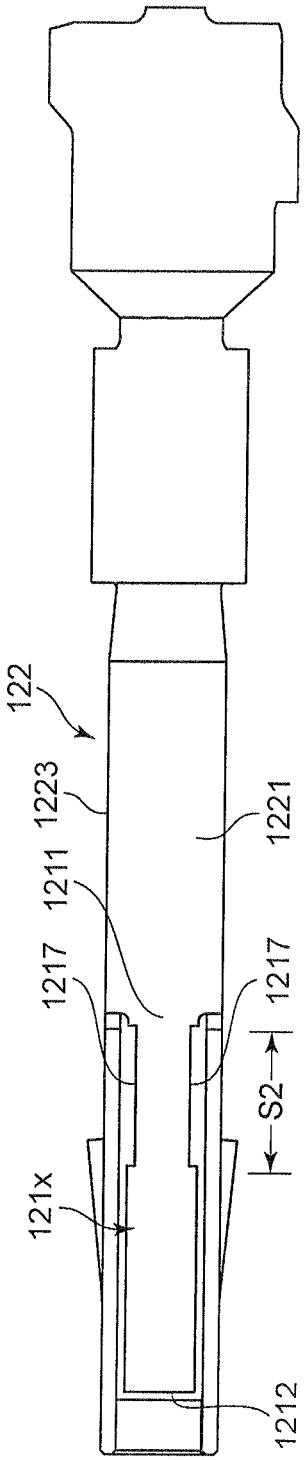


FIG. 26

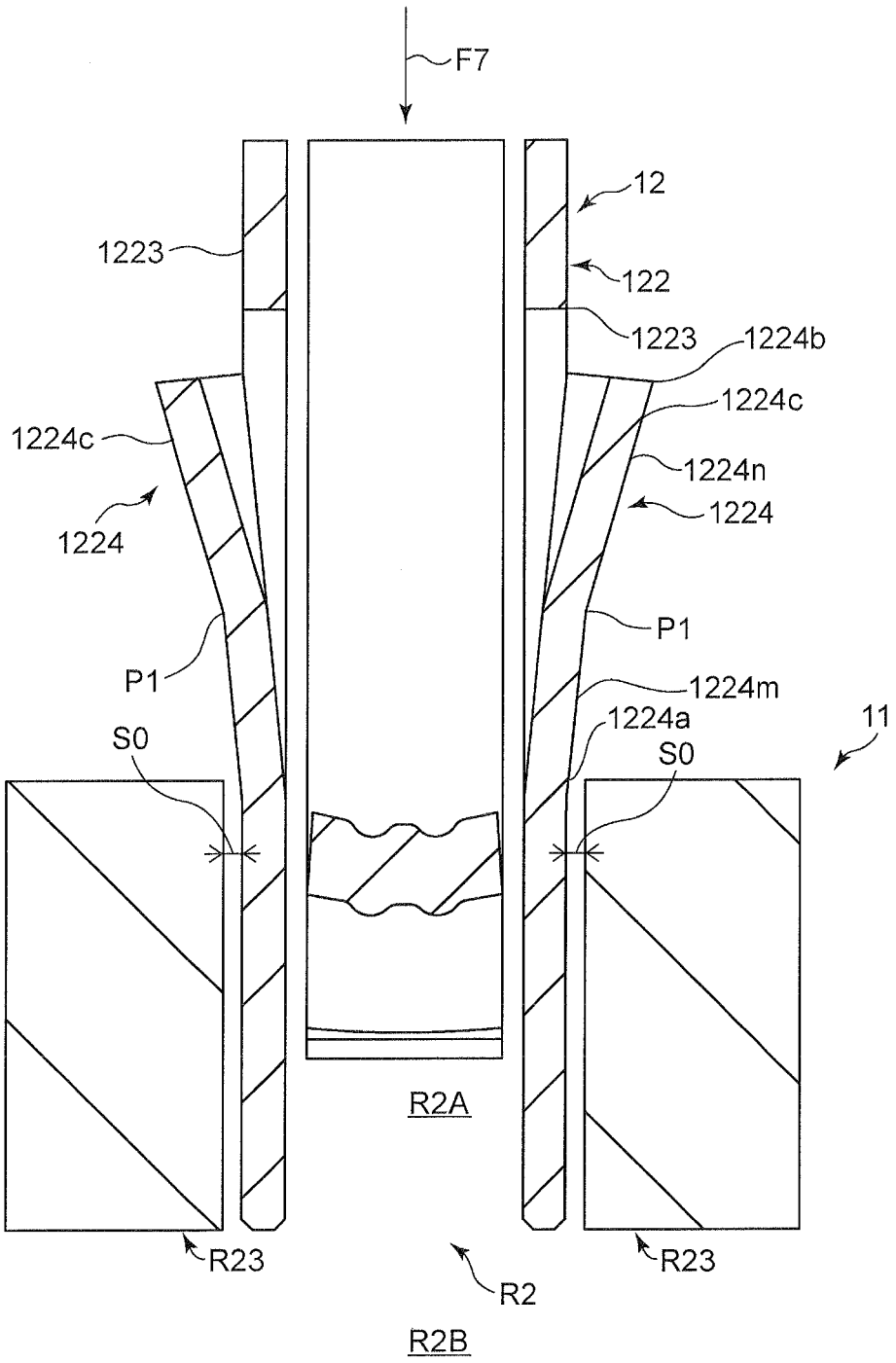

F7
12
1223
122
1223
1224b
1224c
1224c
1224n
1224
1224
P1
P1
1224m
1224a
11
S0
S0
R2A
R23
R2
R23
R2B

FIG. 27

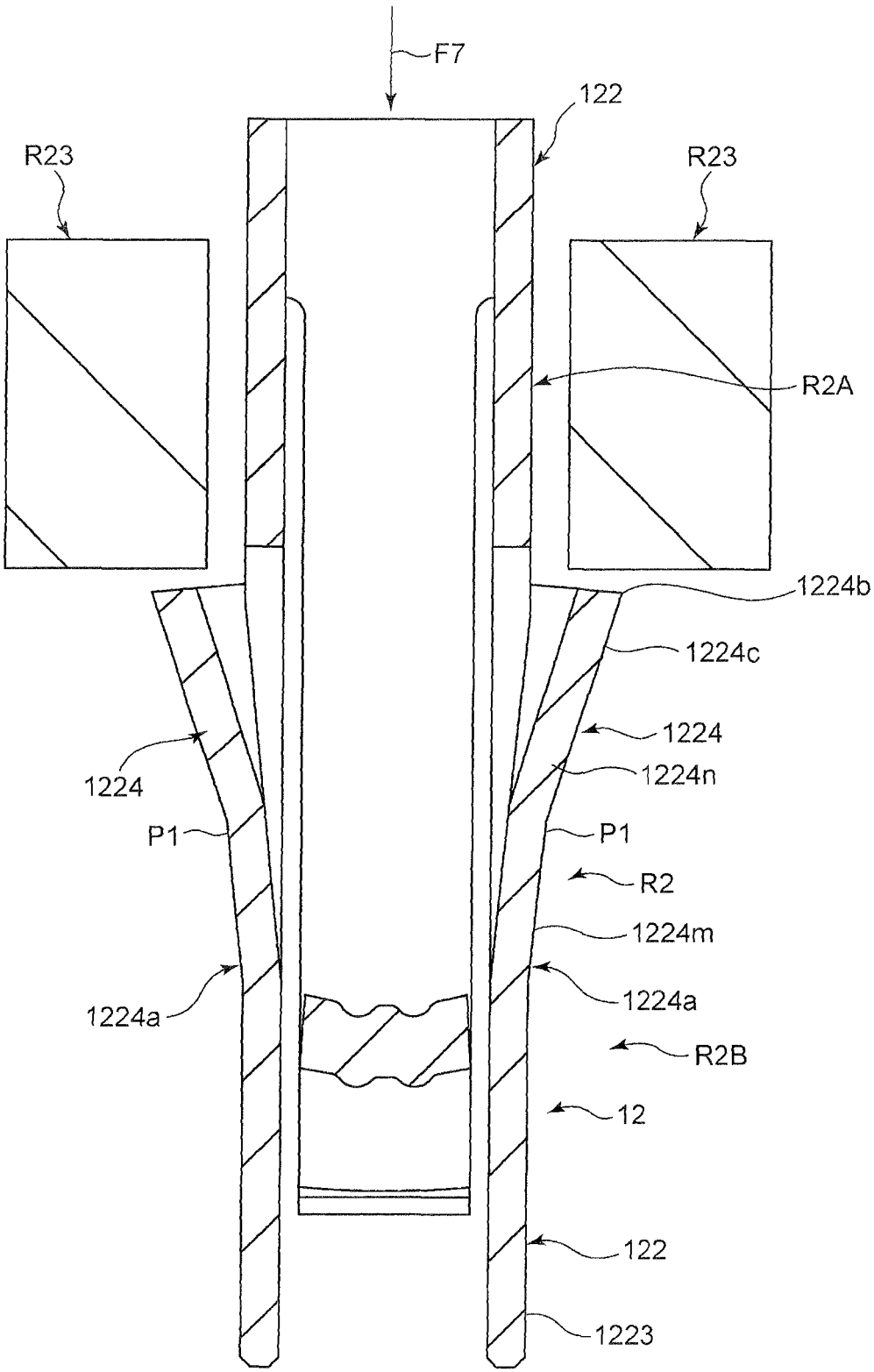

F7
122
R23
R23
R2A
1224b
1224c
1224
1224
1224n
P1
P1
R2
1224m
1224a
1224a
R2B
12
122
1223

FIG. 28

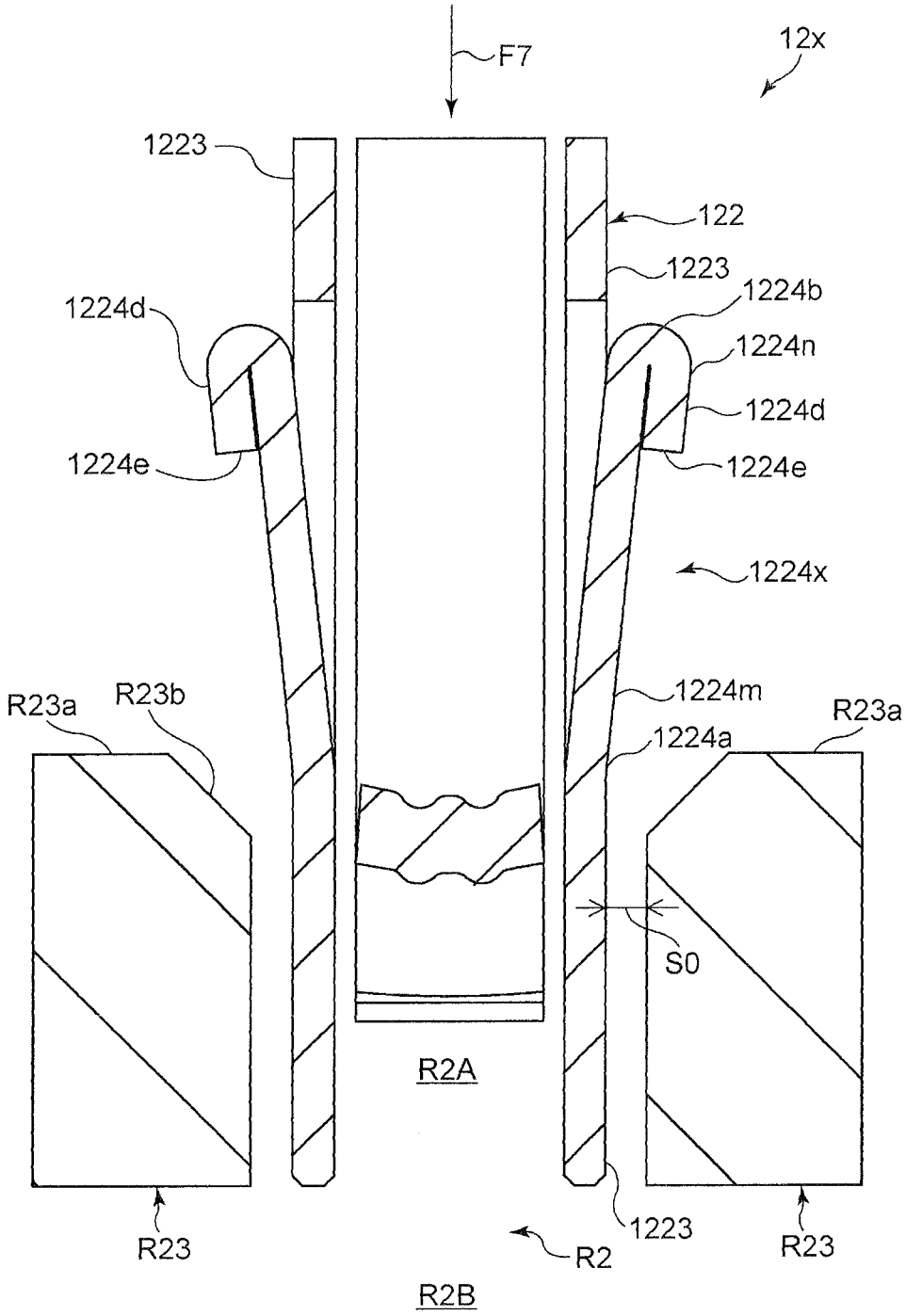

F7
12x
1223
122
1223
1224b
1224d
1224n
1224d
1224e
1224e
1224x
1224m
R23a
R23b
1224a
R23a
S0
R2A
R23
1223
R2
R23
R2B

FIG. 29

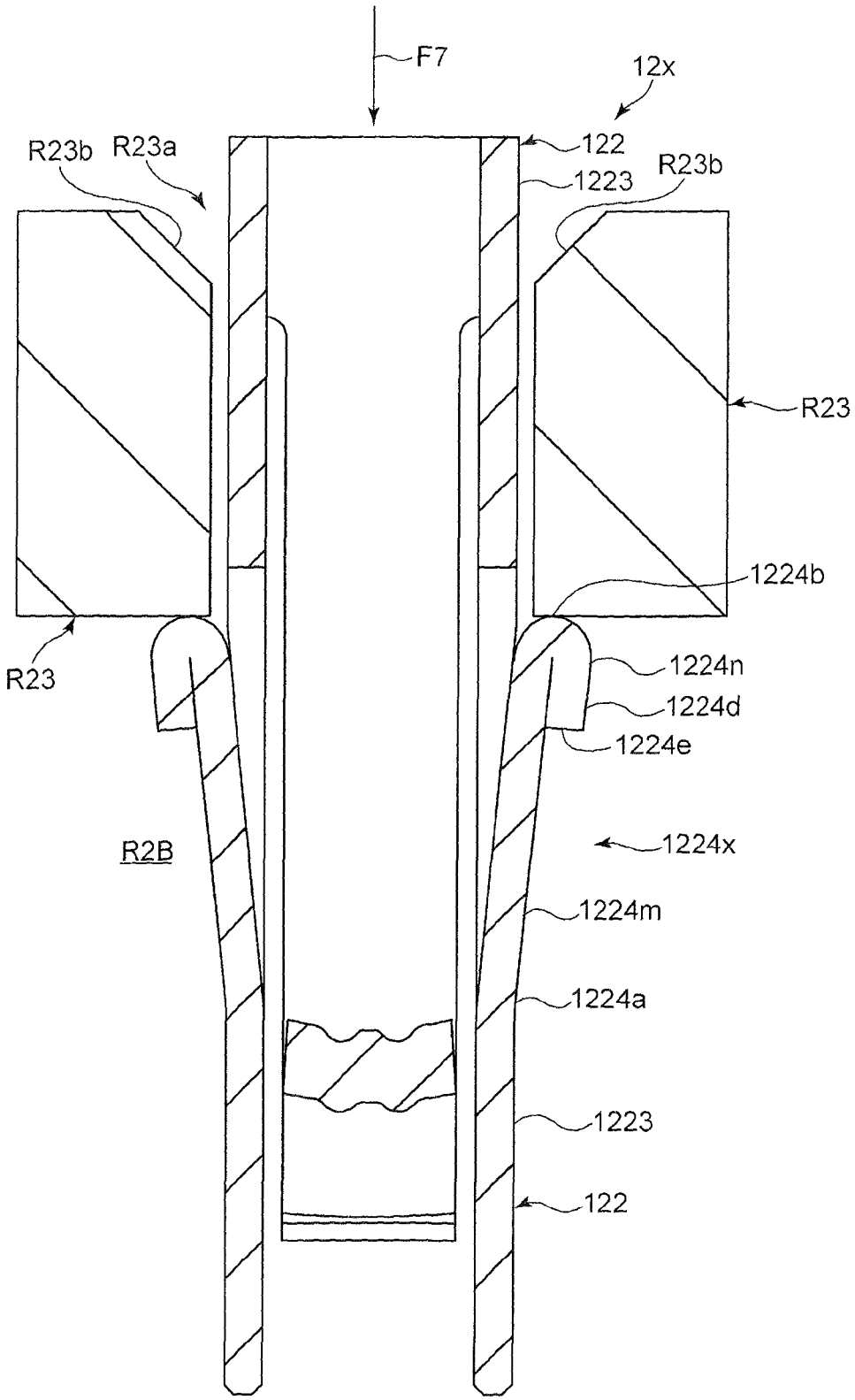

F7
12x
R23b
R23a
122
1223
R23b
R23
1224b
R23
1224n
1224d
1224e
R2B
1224x
1224m
1224a
1223
122

FIG. 30

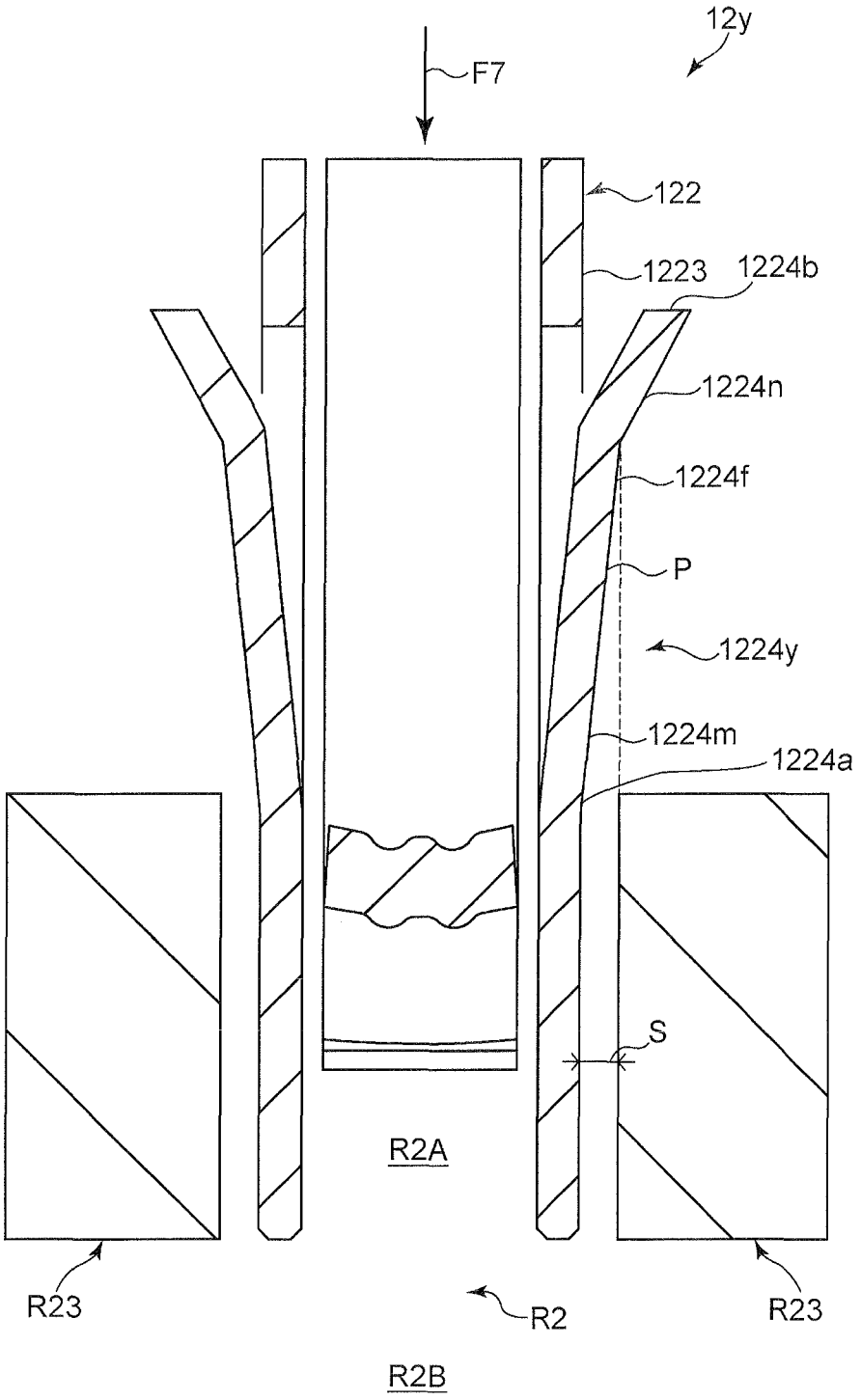
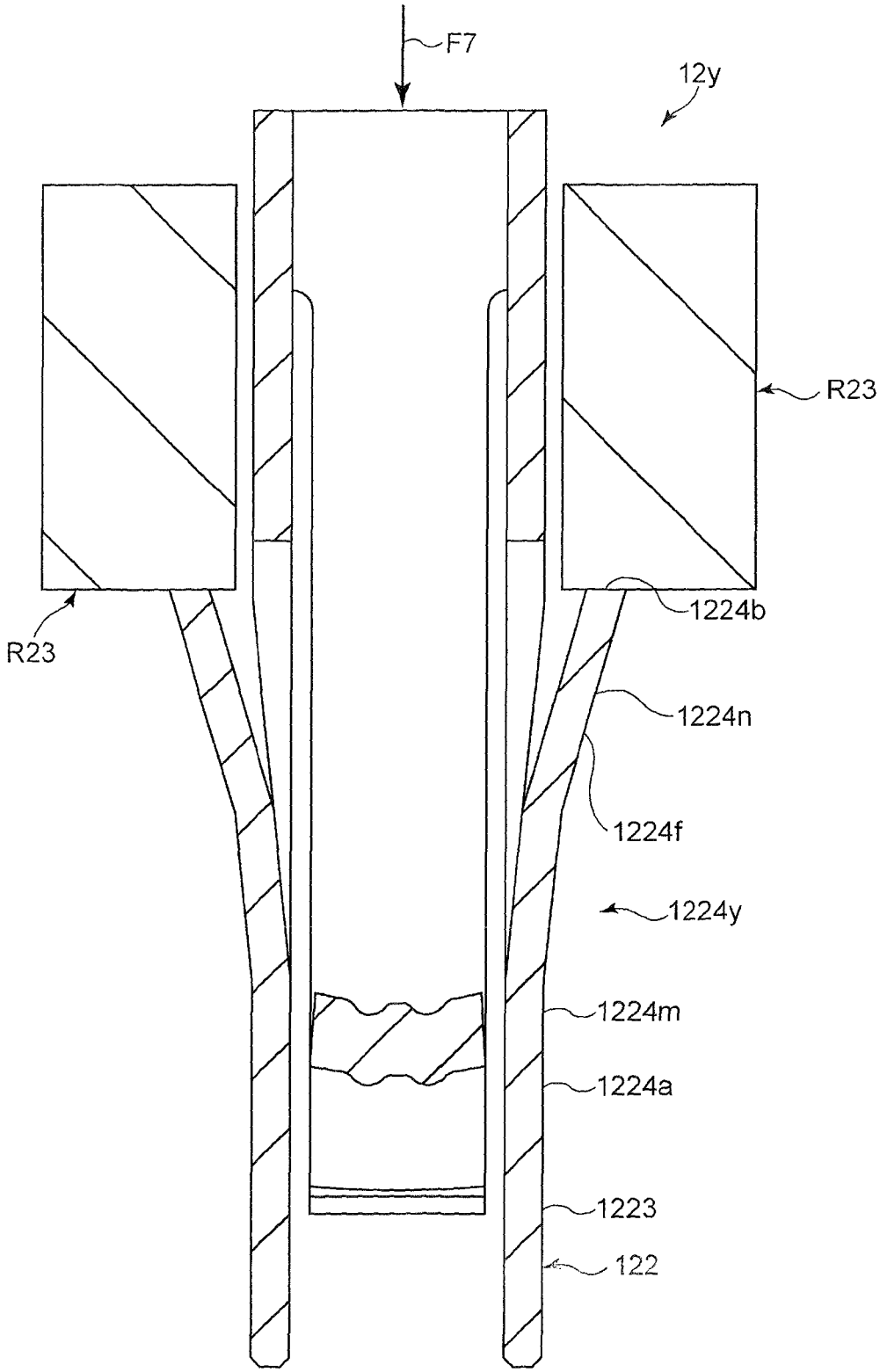

12y
F7
122
1223
1224b
1224n
1224f
P
1224y
1224m
1224a
S
R2A
R23
R2
R23
R2B

FIG. 31



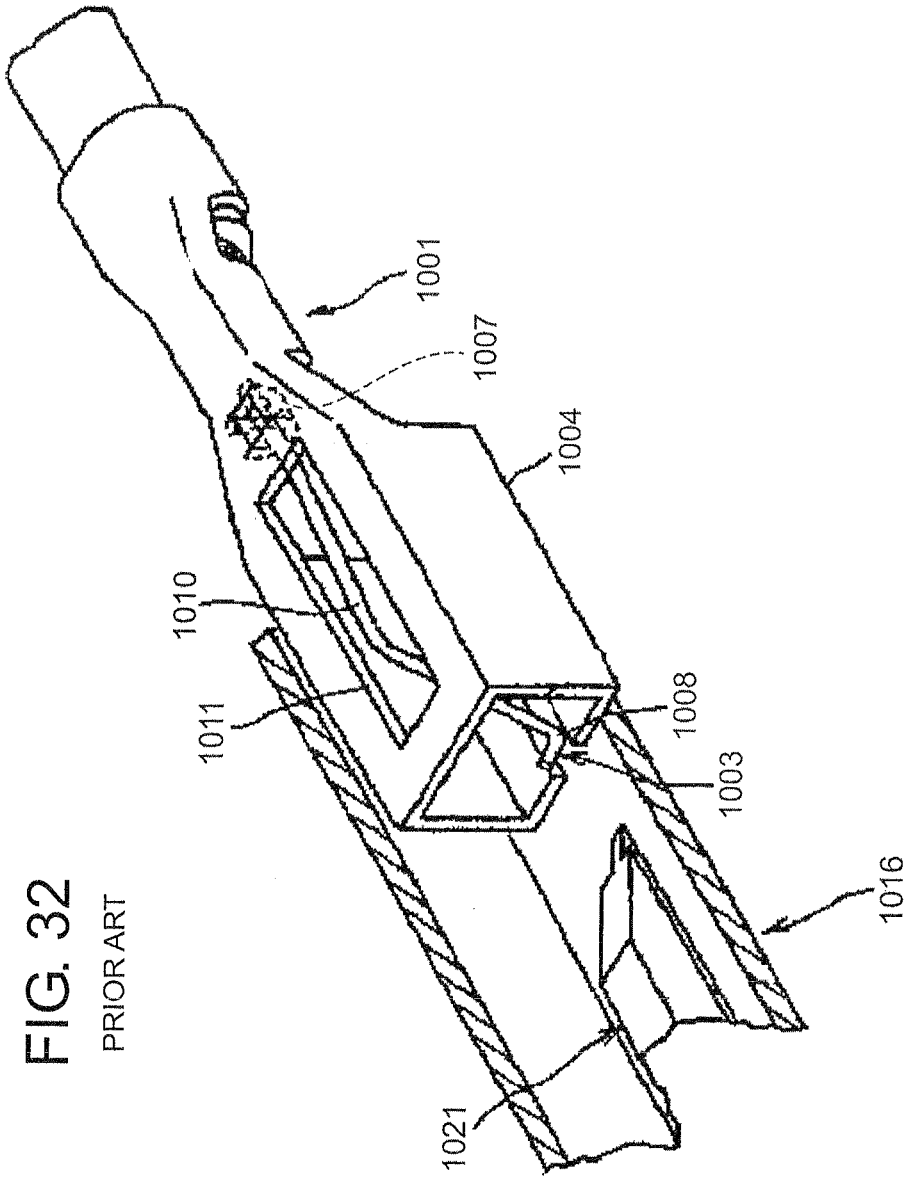


FIG. 32
PRIOR ART

CONNECTOR TERMINAL

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a connector terminal including an elastic contact piece provided with a part projecting out of a body of thereof when the connector terminal is inserted into a housing.

2. Description of the Related Art

A known connector terminal includes an elastic contact piece with a part (a contact part) projecting out of a body thereof when the connector terminal is inserted into a terminal space formed in a housing. The connector terminal contacts another terminal through the part of the elastic contact piece projecting out of the terminal body. The connector terminal is, however, accompanied with the following problems. First, the part may be damaged and/or deformed when a cable is compressed onto the connector terminal to be fixed to the connector terminal. Second, the part may be grazed with an inner surface of the terminal space to be damaged when the connector terminal is inserted into the terminal space.

FIG. **32** is a perspective view of a connector disclosed in Japanese Utility Model Publication No. 2598581 with a partial cross-sectional view thereof. As illustrated in FIG. **32**, a spring **1003** is housed in a box **1004** to be protected when a terminal **1001** has not been yet inserted into a connector housing **1016**. And then, the terminal **1001** is inserted thereinto, a sliding portion **1008** of the spring **1003** slides along a tapered guide surface, and is pressed by a pressing projection **1021** to be lifted up. Thus, a contact part **1010** of the spring **1003** projects out of the box **1004** through an opening **1011**.

The spring **1003** is neither damaged nor deformed when a cable is compressed onto and thus fixed to the terminal **1001** or when the terminal **1001** is inserted into the connector housing **1016**. The connector provides enhanced reliability to electrical connection between the terminal **1001** and another terminal (not illustrated) through the contact part **1010**.

In the connector illustrated in FIG. **32**, the spring **1003** is wholly lifted up by the projection **1021** when the terminal **1001** is inserted into the connector housing **1016**. The spring **1003** is fixed at a proximal end thereof to the box **1004** by collapsing a piece **1007** to thereby fix the spring **1003** onto the box **1004**. Thus, the spring **1003** is supported by the box **1004** in a canti-lever. Consequently, the connector is accompanied with a problem that the spring **1003** cannot have a sufficient spring length, and hence, when the contact part **1010** of the spring **1003** projects out of the opening **1011** of the box **1004** to contact another terminal, the spring **1003** may be plastically deformed, resulting in that there cannot be ensured a sufficient contact pressure between the spring **1003** and another terminal.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In view of the above-mentioned problems, an object of the present invention is to provide a connector terminal capable of preventing an elastic contact piece from being damaged and/or deformed when the connector terminal is inserted into a housing, and further, ensuring a sufficient spring length after the connector terminal has been inserted into a housing, to thereby ensure a sufficient contact pressure between the elastic contact piece and another terminal.

A first aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal, comprising: a terminal body operable to be inserted into a terminal space formed in a housing, and; an elastic contact piece arranged in the terminal body, the terminal body including: a bottom wall possessing an first opening; and a top wall facing the bottom wall spaced away therefrom, wherein the elastic contact piece includes: a first end fixed to the bottom wall; a second end abutting on the top wall and being a free end; and a substantially U-shaped folded portion located between the first and second ends, the terminal space includes a raised portion having a height from the bottom wall towards the top wall, when the terminal body is inserted into the terminal space, the folded portion runs onto the raised portion, and a part of the elastic contact piece moves out of the opening, and the second end abuts on the bottom wall.

In the connector terminal according to the present invention, when the connector terminal has not been yet inserted into a terminal space formed in a housing, the elastic contact piece is housed in the terminal body. Upon inserting it into the terminal space, the folded portion of the elastic contact piece runs onto the raised portion, and thus, the elastic contact piece projects at the part (a contact part) thereof out of the terminal body through the opening. That is, the part of the elastic contact piece can be exposed out of the terminal body by merely inserting the connector terminal into the terminal space. Since the second end of the elastic contact piece is a free end, the second end contacts the bottom wall and acts as a fulcrum when the folded portion runs onto the raised portion. Thus, the elastic contact piece can be supported with both the folded portion and the second end.

A second aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the first aspect, wherein: the elastic contact piece further includes an angle changer changing an angle by which the elastic contact piece is bent between the first end and the folded portion; and a first direction in which the elastic contact piece extends between the first end and the angle changer differs from a second direction in which the elastic contact piece extends between the angle changer and the folded portion from each other.

The angle changer arranged between the first end and the folded portion changes an angle by which the elastic contact piece extends from the first end, and further, changes an angle by which the elastic contact piece extends from the angle changer.

A third aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the first aspect, wherein the angle changer is constituted of a curved portion directing the folded portion to the bottom wall.

A fourth aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the second aspect, wherein: a first portion of the elastic contact piece between the first end and the angle changer inclines toward the top wall; and a second portion of the elastic contact piece between the angle changer and the folded portion inclines toward the bottom wall.

Even if the folded portion is located at the same height as the raised portion, a portion of the elastic contact piece between the curved portion and the first end can be deformed, and the curved portion can be widened, resulting in that the contact terminal can be housed in the terminal space without a portion of the elastic contact piece between the curved portion and the folded portion being deformed.

A fifth aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the fourth aspect, wherein: the top wall possesses a second opening; and a part of the folded portion outwardly projects from the terminal body through the second opening.

A sixth aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the second aspect, wherein: the angle changer is constituted of an area having a width smaller than the remainder of the elastic contact piece.

The elastic contact piece can be readily deformed at the area.

A seventh aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the first aspect, wherein: the elastic contact piece includes a curved portion forming a convex from the top wall to the bottom wall; the second end is continuous to the curved portion; and when the folded portion runs onto the raised portion, not the second end but the top wall abuts on the bottom wall.

Since the second end is continuous to the curved portion, the elastic contact piece contacts the bottom wall at the curved portion. Accordingly, it is possible to prevent the bottom wall from being damaged. Furthermore, since the curved portion slides on the bottom wall, the elastic contact piece can readily move on the bottom wall.

An eighth aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the first aspect, wherein: the elastic contact piece extends in an axial direction of a cylindrical terminal contacting therewith; and the part of the elastic contact piece possesses an arc outer surface along a peripheral surface of the cylindrical terminal.

Thus, even if the arc contact surface does not have a uniform curvature, the elastic contact surface can stably contact the arc contact surface of the cylindrical terminal.

By designing the part of the elastic contact piece to have the arc outer surface along the peripheral surface of the cylindrical terminal, the part can stably contact the peripheral surface of the cylindrical terminal.

A ninth aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the eighth aspect, wherein: a plurality of projections extending in an axial direction of the cylindrical terminal are formed on an outer surface of the part of the elastic contact piece; and the plurality of projections are arranged in a peripheral direction of the cylindrical terminal.

By forming the plurality of the projections, even if at least one of the peripheral contact surface and the arc outer surface does not have a uniform curvature, the elastic contact piece contacts the cylindrical terminal at two or more points. Accordingly, the contact terminal can be kept in stable contact the cylindrical terminal.

A tenth aspect of the present invention provides a connector terminal in addition to the first aspect, wherein: the raised portion includes a slope inclining from the bottom wall to the top wall; a horizontal portion continuous with a top of the slope; and the folded portion runs onto the horizontal portion such that a part of the folded portion contacts a surface of the horizontal portion.

It is possible for the part of the folded portion contacting the horizontal portion to uniformly receive contact pressure acting on the part of the elastic contact piece, and to be supported by the horizontal portion when the part of the elastic contact piece contacts the cylindrical terminal. Accordingly, the part of the elastic contact piece can be uniformly compressed onto the cylindrical terminal.

The advantages obtained by the aforementioned present invention will be described hereinbelow.

The connector terminal according to the present invention is inserted into the terminal space, and thus, the folded portion of the elastic contact piece runs onto a raised portion, resulting in that the part of the elastic contact piece is exposed out of the terminal body, and further, the second end of the elastic contact piece, which is a free end, contacts the bottom wall to thereby act as a fulcrum for supporting the elastic contact piece. Thus, when having not been yet inserted into a housing, the connector terminal according to the present invention makes it possible to prevent the elastic contact piece from being damaged and/or deformed, and further, to ensure a sufficient spring length when the connector terminal is inserted into the housing, to thereby ensure a necessary contact pressure between the elastic contact piece and another terminal.

The above and other objects and advantageous features of the present invention will be made apparent from the following description made with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate the same or similar parts throughout the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a first electrical connector in a preferable embodiment according to the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a front view of the first electrical connector illustrated in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a perspective view of a connector terminal;

FIG. **4** is a side view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3**;

FIG. **5** is a partial cross-sectional view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **4**;

FIG. **6** is a front view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3**;

FIG. **7** is a side view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **4**, showing that the elastic contact piece is lifted up, resulting in that the elastic contact piece projects out of a terminal body;

FIG. **8** is a front view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **7**;

FIG. **9** is a perspective view of a projecting terminal illustrated in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **10** is a perspective view of a second electrical connector in the preferable embodiment according to the present invention;

FIG. **11** is a front view of the second electrical connector illustrated in FIG. **10**;

FIG. **12** is a perspective view of a first cylindrical terminal of in the second electrical connector illustrated in FIG. **10**;

FIG. **13** is a perspective view of a second cylindrical terminal of the second electrical connector illustrated in FIG. **10**;

FIG. **14** is a cross-sectional view showing a state where the first connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **1** and the second connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **10** are fitted with each other;

FIG. **15** is a perspective cross-sectional view showing a state where the first connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **1** and the second connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **10** are fitted with each other;

FIG. **16** is a perspective cross-sectional view showing a state where the first connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **1** and the second connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **10** are fitted with each other next to FIG. **15**;

FIG. **17** is a cross-sectional view showing a state where the first connector terminal and the second connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **14** are fitted with each other;

FIG. **18** is a partially enlarged cross-sectional view showing a state where the first connector terminal and the second connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **15** are fitted with each other;

FIG. **19** is a partially enlarged cross-sectional view showing a state sifted from the state where the first connector terminal and the second connector terminal are fitted with each other in FIG. **18**;

FIG. **20** is a partial cross-sectional view showing a contacting state between the first connector terminal in FIG. **3** illustrated in FIG. **3** and the first cylindrical terminal illustrated in FIG. **12**;

FIG. **21** is a perspective view showing a contacting state between the first connector terminal in FIG. **3** illustrated in FIG. **3** and the first cylindrical terminal illustrated in FIG. **12**;

FIG. **22** is a partial cross-sectional view showing a contacting state between the first connector terminal and the first cylindrical terminal illustrated in FIG. **21**;

FIG. **23**A is a partial cross-sectional view of a terminal space into which the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3** is inserted;

FIG. **23**B is a partial cross-sectional view of a terminal space in which the elastic contact piece runs onto a raised portion next to FIG. **23**A;

FIG. **24** is a side view of the connector terminal including an elastic contact piece according to a variant;

FIG. **25** is a bottom view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **24** according to the variant;

FIG. **26** is a partial cross-sectional view showing the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3**, showing a state before being inserted into a terminal space;

FIG. **27** is a partial cross-sectional view showing the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3**, showing a state after having been inserted into a terminal space next to FIG. **26**;

FIG. **28** is a partial cross-sectional view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3** according to a first variant, showing a state before being inserted into the terminal space;

FIG. **29** is a partial cross-sectional view of the connector terminal, showing a state after having been inserted into the terminal space next to FIG. **28**;

FIG. **30** is a partial cross-sectional view of the connector terminal illustrated in FIG. **3** according to the second variant, showing a state before being inserted into the terminal space;

FIG. **31** is a partial cross-sectional view of the connector terminal, showing a state after having been inserted into the terminal space next to FIG. **30**; and

FIG. **32** is a perspective view of a conventional connector recited in Reference **1**.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A connector terminal according to the first embodiment of the present invention will be explained hereinbelow with reference to drawings.

In the specification, with respect to words of "front and rear," a word of "front" means a side through which the two electrical connectors are fit into each other, and a word of "rear" means the opposite side of the "front".

A first electrical connector **10** illustrated in FIG. **1** and a second electrical connector **20** illustrated in FIG. **10** can be used for connecting various kinds of sensors with a wire harness, for example. The second electrical connector **20** is the connector terminal according to the present invention.

First, the first electrical connector **10** is explained hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. **1** to **9**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **1**, **2** and **14**, the first electrical connector **10** includes: an outer housing **11** (a first housing) into which the second electrical connector **20** illustrated in FIG. **10** is fit; a plurality of first contact terminals **12** (connector terminals) through which the first electrical connector **10** is electrically connected with the second electrical connector **20**; and a projecting terminal **13** through which the first electrical connector **10** is electrically connected with the second electrical connector **20**.

The outer housing **11** is cylindrical in shape. The outer housing **11** is constituted of a first member **111** and a second member **112**.

The first member **111** includes a cover portion **111***a* at a rear end of the outer housing **11**. The cover portion **111***a* protects a connector through which cables C are connected with terminals (the first contact terminals **12** and the projecting terminal **13**), and houses a seal **124** (See, FIG. **3**.) therein. The first member **111** further includes a first shaft **114** provided with a terminal space R**1** into which the projecting terminal **13** is to be inserted. The first shaft **114** extends coaxially with a central axis L**1** of the outer housing **11**.

As illustrated in FIG. **15**, the first shaft **114** is designed to have three stages each having a diameter increasing toward a proximal end from an open end thereof. Specifically, the first shaft **114** includes: a front end stage; a middle stage; and a rear end stage, in which the front stage has a diameter smaller than that of the middle stage, and the middle stage has a smaller diameter than that the rear end stage.

A guide hole **114***a* extending axially of the first shaft **114** to lead to the terminal space R**1** is formed in the first shaft **114**.

The first member **111** includes: a peripheral wall part **111***c* provided with a terminal space R**2** between itself and the first shaft **114** for allowing the first contact terminals **12** to be inserted thereinto; and a locking piece **111***f* through which the first member **111** is engaged with the second member **112**.

The second member **112** is cylindrical, and a first fitting hole **115** between the first shaft **114** and itself is formed when coupled to the first member **111**. The second electrical connector **20** (See, FIG. **16**.) is fit into the thus formed first fitting hole **115**.

As illustrated in FIG. **2**, a plurality of linear grooves **111***g* arranged radially of the central axis L**1** of the outer housing and extending in a length-wise direction F**1** the first electrical connector **10** formed on an inner surface of the first fitting hole **115** surrounded by the second member **112**. In the second member **112** of the first embodiment, the linear grooves **111***g* are formed on the inner surface of the first fitting hole **115** at five locations among nine locations spaced away from one another by 40 degrees in a peripheral angle.

As illustrated in FIG. **14**, a seal member **113** of a ring shape is provided inside of a coupling part between the first member **111** and the second member **112** illustrated in FIG. **1**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **2** and **14**, each of the first contact terminals **12** is arranged on an outer surface of the first shaft **114** in parallel with a central axis of the first shaft **114**. In front view of the first fitting hole **115**, the first contact terminals **12** are peripherally equally spaced away from one another around the first shaft **114**. In the first embodiment, the three first contact terminals **12** are arranged according to the three diameter stages of the first shaft **114** by 120 degrees of a peripheral angle of the outer housing **11**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **3** to **6**, each of the first contact terminals **12** includes: an electrically conductive elastic contact piece **121** formed by having a metal piece bent into a U-shape; a first terminal body **122** to be inserted into the terminal space R**2** (See, FIG. **14**.); and a bundling portion **123** onto which a cable C**1** is compressed.

A first end **1211** of the elastic contact piece **121** is fixed by being integrated with a bottom wall **1221** of the first terminal body **122**. The elastic contact piece **121** extends from the bottom wall **1221** and forms a U-shaped folded portion **1212** at the end thereof. The elastic contact piece **121** further extends inside of the first terminal body **122** and terminates at a second end **1213** of a free end.

The elastic contact piece **121** has a part acting as a contact part **1214** through which the elastic contact piece **121** contacts a later-mentioned first cylindrical terminal. The contact

part **1214** has an arc possessing an outer surface along a peripheral arc surface of a later-mentioned first cylindrical terminal.

A plurality of slim projections **1214***a* are formed in the contact part **1214**. In the first embodiment, two projections **1214***a* are formed. The projections **1214***a* are arranged on the elastic contact piece **121** in a direction F**3** (a width direction of the elastic contact piece **121**) perpendicular to the central axis L**1** of the first cylindrical terminal.

Between the first end **1211** and the folded portion **1212**, a first curved portion **1215** is formed. The first curved portion **1215** bends the folded portion **1212** toward the bottom wall **1211**. In an initial condition of the elastic contact piece **121**, the curved portion **1215** in the first embodiment is bent in a manner such that an ascent portion from the first end **1211**, which is continuous to the bottom wall **1221**, to an opening **1222***a* turns to the bottom wall **1221**, which is the opposite side of the opening **1222***a*.

In the initial condition, the folded portion **1212** projects out of the bottom wall **1221** of the first terminal body **122**, and the contact part **1214** does not project out of the opening **1222***a* formed at a top wall **1222** of the first terminal body **122**. At the second end **1213** of the elastic contact piece **121**, a second curved portion **1216** possessing a convex towards the bottom wall **1221** is formed.

As illustrated in FIG. **3**, the first terminal body **122** is designed to be hollow and have a rectangular cross-section.

The first terminal body **122** is formed at sidewalls **1223** thereof with a lance **1224**. The lance **1224** is formed by forming a cutting line around a part of the sidewall **1223**, and outwardly inclining the part.

As illustrated in FIG. **26**, the lance **1224** prevents the first contact terminal **12** from being released out of the terminal space R**2** after the first contact terminal **12** has been inserted into the terminal space R**2** (See, FIG. **14**.) of the outer housing **11**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **3**, **26** and **27**, the lance **1224** has an open end **1224***b* defining a slope **1224***c* inclining relative to the sidewall **1223** such that the open end **1224***b* is remotest from the sidewall **1213**. Furthermore, the slope **1214***c* has a width varying in a length-wise direction of the first contact terminal **12** such that the width is in maximum at the open end **1224***b*.

The lance **1224** includes: a first slope portion **1224***m* extending from the first terminal body **122** at a first inclination angle relative to the first terminal body **122**; and a second slope portion **1224***n* outwardly inclining from the first terminal body **122** at a second inclination angle greater than the first inclination angle relative to the first terminal body **122**, and defining the slope **1224***c*.

As illustrated in FIG. **4**, the bundling portion **123** compresses the cable C**1** thereonto to fix the same therein. The bundling portion **123** includes an insulation barrel **123***a* and a wire barrel **123***b*. The first contact terminal **12** further includes a seal **124** into which the cable C**1** is inserted, at a rear of the bundling portion **123**.

The projecting terminal **13** illustrated in FIG. **14** is housed in the terminal space R**1** formed at a proximal end of the first shaft **114**, and contacts a later-mentioned second cylindrical terminal of the second electrical connector **20**. As illustrated in FIG. **9**, the projecting terminal **13** includes: a contact portion **131**; a second terminal body **132**; and a bundling portion **133**.

The contact portion **131** includes: a plurality of contact pieces **131***a* equally spaced away from one another; a pair of C-shaped binders **131***b* arranged at distal and proximal ends of the contact pieces **131***a*; and a cone portion **131***d* continuous to the binder **131***b* located at open ends of the contact pieces **131***a*.

The second terminal body **132** is hollow and has a rectangular cross-section.

The bundling portion **133** compresses the cable C**1** thereonto to fix the same therein. The bundling portion **133** includes: an insulation barrel **133***a*; and a wire barrel **133***b*.

Hereinbelow, a structure of the second electrical connector **20** is explained referring to FIGS. **10** to **14**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **10**, **11** and **14**, the second electrical connector **20** includes: an inner housing **21** to be fit into the first electrical connector **10** illustrated in FIG. **1**; a first cylindrical terminal **22** capable of electrically connecting with the first contact terminals **12** of the first electrical connector **10**; and a second cylindrical terminal **23**.

The inner housing **21** includes a peripheral wall part **212** in a front half of the inner housing **21**. The peripheral wall part **212** defines therein a second fixing hole **211** into which the first shaft **114** of the first electrical connector **10** (See, FIG. **1**.) is fit. The second fixing hole **211** is constituted of a plurality of stages each having an inner diameter gradually decreasing from an opening end toward a rear. The peripheral wall part **212** has an outer peripheral surface **212***a* contacting an inner surface of the first fitting hole **115** when the first electrical connector **10** is fit into the first fitting hole **115** of the second electrical connector **20**. A front half of the peripheral wall part **212** is a cylindrical portion **212***b* on which no projection is formed. Three linear projections **212***c* each extending in a length-wise direction of the second electrical connector **20** are formed at a rear half of the peripheral wall part **212***a* radially of and around an axis L**2** (See, FIG. **10**.) of the inner housing **21**. In the first embodiment, the linear projections **212***c* are equally spaced away from one another in a peripheral direction F**4**, that is, are arranged by 120 peripheral degrees.

A second shaft **213** extends in the second fixing, hole **211**. The second shaft **213** is cylindrical in shape, and includes the second cylindrical terminal **23** arranged therein.

The first cylindrical terminal **22** is coaxial with the second shaft **213**, and is fixed on an inner surface of the second fixing hole **211** of the inner housing **21** with a contact surface **2212** being exposed outside. As illustrated in FIG. **12**, the first cylindrical terminal **22** includes: a cylindrical contact portion **221**; and a linear connector portion **222**.

The contact portion **221** contacts the elastic contact piece **121** of the first contact terminal **12** (See, FIG. **3**.). The contact portion **221** is formed by joining opposite ends of electrically conductive sheets to each other through a joint portion **2211**. For instance, a first end **2211***a* is designed to have a projection, and a second end **2211***b* is designed to have a recess. By fitting the projection into the recess and fixing them to each other, the ends **2211***a* and **2211***b* are joined to each other. Since the joint portion **2211** is defined by the combination of the above-mentioned projection and recess, the joint portion **2211** has a length ranging between proximal and open ends of the contact portion **221**, and a width equal to a length of the projection or the recess.

As illustrated in FIG. **14**, the second fixing hole **211** of the inner housing **21** defines therein three stages each having an inner diameter different from others. Specifically, a first stage located close to an open end of the second fixing hole **211** has a greatest inner diameter, a third stage located remotest from an open end of the second fixing hole **211** has a smallest inner diameter, and a second stage located between the first and

third stages has an inner diameter smaller than an inner diameter of the first stage, but greater than an inner diameter of the third stage.

The second electrical connector **20** includes three first cylindrical terminals **22**, each of which is arranged on an inner surface of each of the first to third stages defined in the second fixing hole **211** of the inner housing **21**. The contact portion **211** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** arranged on an inner surface of the first stage has a greatest inner diameter among the contact portions **211** of the three first cylindrical terminals **22**, the contact portion **211** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** arranged on an inner surface of the third stage has a smallest inner diameter among the contact portions **211** of the three first cylindrical terminals **22**, and the contact portion **211** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** arranged on an inner surface of the second stage has an inner diameter intermediate between the greatest and smallest inner diameters.

The connecting portion **222** straightly extends from the contact portion **221** towards a rear end of the inner housing **21**, and has an open end exposed out of the inner housing **21** and to be connected to a printed wiring board (not illustrated). The connecting portion **222** is formed with a lance **2221** for preventing the first cylindrical terminal **22** from being released from the inner housing **21**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **10**, **11** and **14**, the second cylindrical terminal **23** is housed in the second shaft **213**. The second cylindrical terminal **23** has an open end through which the projecting terminal **13** is inserted thereinto. The second cylindrical terminal **23** outwardly extends beyond the second shaft **213**, and thus, is exposed at an open end thereof out of the second shaft **213**. The second cylindrical terminal **23** is arranged to closely contact the second shaft **213** so as to be integrated therewith.

As illustrated in FIG. **13**, the second cylindrical terminal **23** includes: a cylindrical portion **231**; a constricted part **232**, a closed section **233**; and an L-shaped connecting portion **234**.

The constricted part **232** is located at a rear of the cylindrical portion **231**, and has a thickness reduced in a direction in which the connecting portion **234** extends. Specifically, the constricted part **232** has a width (a length in a first direction A**1**) equal to a diameter of the cylindrical portion **231**, and has a thickness (a length in a second direction A**2** perpendicular to the first direction A**1**) gradually decreasing in a length-wise direction of the second cylindrical terminal **23** from a diameter equal to the same of the cylindrical portion **231**. As a result of the reduction in a thickness, the constricted part **232** is finally flat.

The closed section **233** is located at a rear of the constricted part **232** and at a proximal end of the second cylindrical terminal **23**. The closed section **235** has a width (a length in the direction A**1**) greater than the same of the constricted part **233**. Furthermore, the closed section **233** has a thickness smaller than a diameter of the cylindrical portion **231** and a width greater than a diameter of the cylindrical portion **231**.

The L-shaped connecting portion **234** is continuous to the closed section **233**. The connecting portion **234** includes:

a plate-shaped portion **234***a* bending perpendicularly to the closed section **233**, and further, perpendicularly bending to be in parallel with the cylindrical portion **231**; and

a needle portion **234***b* outwardly extending from an open end of the plate-shaped portion **234***a*.

How the first and second electrical connectors **10** and **20** configured as mentioned above are used is explained hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. **15** to **20**.

As illustrated in FIG. **15**, the first electrical connector **10** and the second electrical connector **20** are caused to come close to each other. Then, an open end of the peripheral wall part **212** (of the inner housing **21**) is aligned with the first fitting hole **115** of the outer housing **11**, and an open end of the second shaft **213** (of the inner housing **21**) is also aligned with the guide hole **114***a* (of the first shaft **114**).

Then, the peripheral wall part **212** (of the inner housing **21**) is forwarded in the length-wise direction F**1** of the first fitting hole **115**, and the second shaft **213** (of the inner housing **21**) is also forwarded in the length-wise direction F**1** (of the guide hole **114***a*).

As illustrated in FIG. **16**, a front half of the peripheral wall part **212** (of the inner housing **21**) is the cylindrical portion **212***b* on which no projections are formed (See, FIG. **10**.). Accordingly, when only the front half of the peripheral wall part **212** is inserted into the first fitting hole **115** (of the outer housing **11**), the linear projections **212***c* (of the inner housing **21**) are not yet fit into the linear grooves **111***g* (of the outer housing **11**). Thus, a user can fit the outer housing **21** into the inner housing **11** with one of them being rotated around an axis thereof. A user can forward the inner housing **21** relative to the outer housing **11** without due care and attention to a direction of the rotation.

After the state in FIG. **16**, the peripheral wall part **212** of the inner housing **21** is wholly forwarded into the first fitting hole **115** of the outer housing **11**, and then the linear projections **212***c* of the peripheral wall part **212** are fit into the linear grooves **111***g* of the outer housing **11**, thereby the outer housing **11** and the inner housing **21** are positioned relative to each other. Accordingly, the outer and inner housings **11** and **21** cannot rotate relative to each other.

Furthermore, when the peripheral wall part **212** is wholly forwarded into the first fitting hole **115**, the projecting terminal **13** is inserted into the second cylindrical terminal **23** to contact therewith. In addition, each of the first cylindrical terminals **22** of the second electrical connector **20** contacts the elastic contact piece **121** of each of the first contact terminals **12** of the first electrical connector **10**.

As mentioned above, the linear grooves **111***g* of the outer housing **11** and the linear projections **212***c* of the inner housing **21** constitute a positioning unit. The positioning unit is formed by inserting the inner housing **21** into the outer housing **11**. Once formed, the positioning unit prohibits the relative rotation between the inner housing **21** and the outer housing **11** at a position where the first cylindrical terminals **22** and the elastic contact pieces **121** contact each other.

That is, at the beginning of the insertion, the second electrical connector **20** can act as an electrical connector that can freely rotate from the first electrical connector **10** about a direction of the insertion.

After the positioning unit of the outer housing **11** and the inner housing **21** has been formed, the first cylindrical terminals **22** contact the elastic contact pieces **121**. That is, when the first cylindrical terminals **22** contact the elastic contact pieces **121**, the relative rotation between the inner housing **21** and the outer housing **11** has been already prohibited. Consequently, the cylindrical contact portion **221** (of the first cylindrical terminal **22**) and the elastic contact piece **121** (of the first contact terminal **12**) are neither worn down nor damaged caused by the relative rotation between the first and second electrical connectors **10** and **20**.

Even if an axis of the second cylindrical terminal **23** is deviated from an axis of the projecting terminal **13**, there is no problem according to the following reason. That is, when the projecting terminal **13** starts being fit into the second cylindrical terminal **23**, the contact portion **131** slides on an inner surface of the second cylindrical terminal **23**. The sliding action automatically corrects a posture of the contact portion **131** of the projecting terminal **13**.

However, the projecting terminal **13** is housed in the terminal space R**1** with a gap between the projecting terminal **13** and an inner surface of the first shaft **114**, and further, is locked by the lance **134**. Accordingly, even if the posture of the contact portion **131** is corrected by the second cylindrical terminal **23**, the second terminal body **132** of the projecting terminal **13** can be shifted, within the terminal space R**1**, to a new axial direction in which the posture of the contact portion **131** is corrected. Consequently, the projecting terminal **13** can be moved to follow the new axial direction of the second cylindrical terminal **23**.

As illustrated in FIG. **14**, by further inserting the second electrical connector **20** into the first electrical connector **10**, the peripheral wall part **212** of the inner housing **21** is completely fit into the first fitting hole **115** of the outer housing **11**, the first shaft **14** of the outer housing **11** is completely fit into the second fixing hole **211** of the inner housing **21**, and the second shaft **213** of the inner housing **21** is completely fit into the guide hole **114***a* of the first shaft **114**.

In this situation, each of the first contact terminals **12** arranged on an outer surface of the first shaft **114** contacts each of the contact portions **221** of the first cylindrical terminals **22** arranged on an inner surface of the inner housing **21**. And, the contact portion **131** of the projecting terminal **13** is inserted into the cylindrical portion **231** of the second cylindrical terminal **23** to contact therewith.

Thus, the first and second electrical connectors **10** and **20** are fit with each other.

The first contact terminals **12** are arranged on an outer surface of the first shaft **114** coaxially with a central axis of the first shaft **114**. The first cylindrical terminals **22** are arranged on an inner surface of the inner housing **21** coaxially with the second shaft **213**. Thus, when the first shaft **114** and the second shaft **213** are fit into each other, the first contact terminals **12** can stably contact the first cylindrical terminals **22**.

Hereinbelow is explained another positioning unit for positioning the outer and inner housings **11** and **21** in a peripheral direction when they are fit into each other as they rotate relative to each other.

As illustrated in FIGS. **17** and **19**, the above-mentioned positioning unit is constituted of: the linear grooves **111***g* of the outer housing **11**; and the linear projections **212***c* of the inner housing **21**.

As mentioned before, when the peripheral wall part **212** illustrated in FIG. **10** is inserted only at a front half thereof into the first fitting hole **115** of the outer housing **11**, the linear projections **212***c* of the inner housing **21** have not yet been fit into the linear grooves **111***g* of the outer housing **11**. Thus, the outer and inner housings **11** and **21** can be fit into each other while rotating one of them **11** and **21** relative to the other.

As illustrated in FIG. **17**, after the linear projections **212***c* have been fit into the linear grooves **111***g*, the outer and inner housing **11** and **21** are positioned with respect to a rotative direction, and hence, they cannot rotate around an axis thereof relative to each other.

The linear projections **212***c* and the linear grooves **111***g* cause the elastic contact pieces **121** of the first contact terminals **12** to contact the contact surface **2212** other than the joint portion **2211**.

In FIGS. **17** and **18**, the first contact terminal **12** located at an open end of the first shaft **114** (of the first electrical connector **10**) contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** located at the deepest position of the second fixing hole **211**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **10** and **11**, the three linear projections **212***c* are arranged on the outer peripheral surface **212***a* of the inner housing **21** by 120 peripheral degrees. As illustrated in FIG. **2**, the five linear grooves **111***g* are formed at an inner surface of the first fitting hole **115** of the outer housing **11**. Accordingly, the outer and inner housings **11** and **21** can be fit into each other when the three linear projections **212***c* of the inner housing **21** are aligned with three of the five linear grooves **111***g* of the outer housing **11**.

In FIGS. **17** and **18**, the joint portion **2211** (of the first cylindrical terminal **22**) is located close to one side (a left side in FIG. **17**) of the first contact terminal **12**, and the projections **1214***a* of the elastic contact piece **121** contact the contact surface **2212** of the first cylindrical terminal **22**.

The outer housing **11** is rotated in a counter-clockwise direction by 40 degrees, which is an angular interval between the adjacent linear grooves **111***g*, relative to the condition illustrated in FIG. **17**. Since the first contact terminal **12** is housed in the terminal space R**2** of the outer housing **11**, the first contact terminal **12** is rotated together with the outer housing **11**.

Alternatively, the inner housing **21** is rotated in a clockwise direction by 40 degrees. Since the first cylindrical terminal **22** is fixed to the inner housing **21**, the first cylindrical terminal **22** is rotated together with the inner housing **21**.

The rotated linear projection **212***c* is fit into one (the right one in FIG. **17**) of the linear grooves **111***g* (See, FIGS. **19** and **20**.) located adjacent to another of the linear grooves **111***g* into which the linear projection **212***c* has been fit in FIG. **17**.

Due to the rotation, the linear projection **212***c* moves between the one and the other of the linear grooves **111***g*, and the joint portion **2211** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** moves over the projection **1214***a* of the first contact terminal **12**.

This is because an angular interval between the adjacent linear grooves **111***g* around the central axis L**1** (See, FIG. **1**.) of the outer housing **11** is set greater than an angle covering the joint portion **2211** (See, FIG. **12**.) of the first cylindrical terminal **22** around the central axis L**2** (See, FIG. **10**.) of the inner housing **21**.

Since the joint portion **2211** is formed by joining the opposite ends **2211***a* and **2211***b* of the contact portion **221** to each other, a step in the joint portion **2211** may be formed.

However, since the linear projections **212***c* and the linear grooves **111***g* act as the positioning unit, even if the first electrical connector **10** is fit into the second electrical connector **20** at any peripheral position, the first contact terminals **12** do not contact the joint portion **2211** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** after the linear projections **212***c* has been fit into the linear grooves **111***g*. Accordingly, it is possible to prevent the elastic contact piece **121** of the first contact terminal **12** from contacting the joint portion **2211** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** to thereby be damaged and/or worn out. Thus, the first and second electrical connectors **10** and **20** ensure high reliability to the connection therebetween.

Furthermore, since the linear projections **212***c* and the linear grooves **111***g* are arranged radially around the central axis L**2** of the outer and inner housings **11** and **21**, even if the outer and inner housings **11** and **21** are fit into each other with one of them being in rotation, they can be fit into each other such that the linear projections **212***c* and the linear grooves **111***g* align with each other.

How the contact terminal **12** contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** is explained hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. **21** and **22**.

As illustrated in FIG. **21**, in a situation in which the first and second electrical connectors **10** and **20** are fit into each other, the contact terminal **12** of the first electrical connector **10**

contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** arranged on an inner surface of the second fixing hole **211** formed in the second electrical connector **20**.

The elastic contact piece **121** of the contact terminal **12** is arranged along an axial direction F**5** of the first cylindrical terminal **22**. In other words, the elastic contact piece **121** contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** in a direction perpendicular to a peripheral direction of the arc contact surface **2212**. Accordingly, even if the contact surface **2212** does not have a uniform curvature, the elastic contact piece **121** can stably contact the contact surface **2212**.

As illustrated in FIG. **22**, the contact portion **1214** of the elastic contact piece **121** is designed to have an arc surface extending in a cross-section perpendicular to the axial direction F**5** (See, FIG. **21**.) of the first cylindrical terminal **22**, and along the arc contact surface **2212** of the contact portion **221**. Thus, the contact portion **1214** and the contact surface **2212** are both designed to be arc corresponding to each other, they can further stably contact each other.

A plurality of the projections **1214***a* is formed on an outer surface of the contact portion **1214** in a peripheral direction F**6** of the contact portion **221**. As illustrated in FIG. **21**, each of the projections **1214***a* is designed to be elongate and to extend in the length-wise direction F**5** of the first cylindrical terminal **22**.

For instance, it is assumed that the elastic contact piece **121** is designed not to include the projections **1214***a* on an outer surface of the contact portion **1214**, and accordingly, the contact portion **1214** directly contacts at an outer surface thereof the arc contact surface **2212** of the first cylindrical terminal **22**. In such a case, the contact portion **1214** of the elastic contact piece **121** may be designed to have an arc outer surface along the arc contact surface **2212**, ensuring enlargement in an area at which the contact surface **2212** and the contact portion **1214** contact each other.

If the contact surface **2212** and the contact portion **1214** do not have a uniform curvature, they merely unstably contact each other.

However, since the contact portion **1214** is designed to possess a plurality of the projections **1214***a*, even if the arc contact surface **2212** of the first cylindrical terminal **22** and the arc outer surface of the contact portion **1214** do not have a uniform curvature, the elastic contact piece **121** can contact the first cylindrical terminal **22** at two or more points. Thus, the first contact terminal **12** can stably contact the first cylindrical terminal **22**, ensuring high contact reliability.

Since the projections **1214***a* extend in the length-wise direction F**5** of the first cylindrical terminal **22**, that is, since the projections **1214***a* contacts the arc contact surface **2212** in a direction perpendicular to the peripheral direction of the arc contact surface **2212**, even if the arc contact surface **2212** does not have a uniform curvature, the non-uniform curvature of the arc contact surface **2212** does not exert harmful influence on the contact of the projections **1214***a* with the arc contact surface **2212**.

The projections **1214***a* are equally spaced away from one another in a peripheral direction thereof around a top **1214***b* (See, FIG. **22**.) of the contact portion **1214**. Accordingly, each of the projections **1214***a* uniformly contacts the arc contact surface **2212** of the first cylindrical terminal **22**, ensuring that the projections **1214***a* can stably contact the contact surface **2212**.

Hereinbelow is explained how the contact terminal **12** acts when the contact terminal **12** is inserted into the terminal space R**2** of the outer housing **11**.

As illustrated in FIGS. **4** and **5**, when the contact terminal **12** is not inserted into the terminal space R**2**, the folded portion **1212** projects out of the bottom wall **1221** of the first terminal body **122**.

The contact terminal **12** in such a condition as illustrated in FIG. **14** is inserted into the terminal space R**2** through a rear end of the outer housing **11**. As illustrated in FIG. **23**A, being inserted into the terminal space R**2**, the folded portion **1212** of the elastic contact piece **121** is pushed up by a floor R**21** of the terminal space R**2**, and the folded portion **1212** slides on the floor R**21** of the terminal space R**2**. In the situation illustrated in FIG. **23**A, since the folded portion **1212** contacts the floor R**21** of the terminal space R**2**, the contact part **1214** of the elastic contact piece **121** is still located relatively low although it is slightly pushed up. Specifically, the contact part **1214** is partially exposed out of the opening **1222***a* (See, FIG. **5**.), but not wholly exposed out of the opening **1222***a*, that is, almost of the contact part **1214** is still housed in the first terminal body **122**.

When the contact terminal **12** is further inserted into the terminal space R**2**, as illustrated in FIG. **23**B, the folded portion **1212** runs onto a raised portion **116** formed on the floor R**2** of the terminal space R**2**.

The raised portion **116** includes: a slope **1161** inclining ascending in a direction F**7** in which the contact terminal **12** is inserted into the terminal space R**2**; and a horizontal portion **1162** continuous with a top of the slope **1161**.

Running onto the raised portion **116**, the folded portion **1212** is directed further upwardly. Thus, the contact part **1214** of the elastic contact piece **121** projects out of the opening **1212***a*. As the folded portion **1212** stands up, the free second end **1213** of the elastic contact piece **121** lowers towards the bottom wall **1221** of the first terminal body **122**, and abuts on the bottom wall **1221**. Thus, the second end **1213** acts as a fulcrum to support the elastic contact piece **121**.

As a result that the second end **1213** and accordingly the second curved portion **1216** abuts on the bottom wall **1221**, the folded portion **1212** and the second end **1213** (or the second curved portion **1216**) wholly support the elastic contact piece **121** therewith. Consequently, when the contact part **1214** contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** to thereby be loaded, the load is divided by the folded portion **1212** and the second curved portion **1216**. Thus, it is possible to prevent the folded portion **1212** from being plastically deformed due to the load exerted onto the contact part **1214**, ensuring that a contact load with which the contact part **1214** contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** can be increased.

Furthermore, since the free second end **1213** abuts on the bottom wall of the first terminal body **122**, a length of the elastic contact piece **121** between the contact part **1214** and the second end **1213** can be designed to be an allowable length within the first terminal body **122**. Accordingly, the elastic contact piece **121** can have a sufficiently long spring length, the elastic contact piece **121** can accomplish enhanced spring performance. In addition, the elastic contact piece **121** can be a spring shape difficult to be plastically deformed.

Since the second end **1213** is continuous to the second curved portion **1216**, the bottom wall **1221** is not hurt when the second end **1213** abuts on the bottom wall **1221**. Furthermore, since the second curved portion **1216** slides on the bottom wall **1221**, the second curved portion **1216** can smoothly move on the bottom wall **1221**.

As mentioned above, the contact part **1214** of the elastic contact piece **121** is kept not projected out of the opening **1222***a* until the elastic contact piece **121** runs onto the raised portion **116** after the first contact terminal **12** has been inserted into the terminal space R**2**.

When the folded portion **1212** runs onto the raised portion **116**, the contact part **1214** projects out of the opening **1222***a*, and thus, is exposed out of the first terminal body **122**.

The first curved portion **1215** formed between the first end **1211** and the folded portion **1212** directs the folded portion **1212** towards the bottom wall **1211**. That is, the first curved portion **1215** acts as an angle changer changing an angle by which the elastic contact piece **121** is bent. A direction in which the elastic contact piece **121** extends between the first end **1211** and the angle changer **1215** is different from a direction in which the elastic contact piece **121** extends between the angle changer **1215** and the folded portion **1212**. When the folded portion **1212** runs onto the raised portion **116**, the first curved portion **1215** changes an angle by which the folded portion **1212** is bent relative to the first end **1211**, and hence, a portion of the elastic contact piece **121** between the first curved portion **1215** and the first end **1211** can be deformed.

A portion of the elastic contact piece **121** between the first curved portion **1215** and the first end **1211** obliquely ascend towards the opening **1222***a*, and the first curved portion **1215** directs the folded portion **1212** downwardly towards the bottom wall **1221**. Thus, even if the folded portion **1212** is located at the same height as the raised portion **116**, the portion of the elastic contact piece **121** between the first curved portion **1215** and the first end **1211** can be deformed, and the first curved portion **1215** can be widened, resulting in that the first contact terminal **12** can be housed in the terminal space R**2** while the portion of the elastic contact piece **121** between the first curved portion **1215** and the folded portion **1212** is deformed.

Accordingly, it is possible to prevent the elastic contact piece **121** from being damaged and/or deformed while the first contact terminal **12** is being inserted into the outer housing **11**, and further, the first contact terminal **12** can keep a sufficient contact pressure after having been inserted into the outer housing **11**.

When the first contact terminal **12** is not inserted into the terminal space R**2**, the first curved portion **1215** has a curvature to direct the folded portion **1212** towards the bottom wall **1221**. The elastic contact piece **121** possesses an area S**1** (See, FIG. **23**B.) in which the folded portion **1212** lies on the horizontal portion **1162** (a top face **116***a*) of the raised portion **116** when the folded portion **1212** runs onto the raised portion **116**. The top face **116***a* of the raised portion **116** is formed to be flat, and the area S**1** of the elastic contact piece **121** is formed in a shape of a plate. Thus, the elastic contact piece **121** can closely contact at the area S**1** with the top face **116***a* of the raised portion **116**, because the area S**1** is in parallel with the top face **116***a* when the folded portion **1212** runs onto the raised portion **116**.

Since the folded portion **1212** lies on the top face **116***a* of the raised portion **116** through the flat area S**1**, when the contact part **1214** of the elastic contact piece **121** contacts the first cylindrical terminal **22** (See, FIG. **21**.), the folded portion **1212** is supported on the horizontal portion **1612** with the contact pressure between the contact part **1214** and the first cylindrical terminal **22** being received uniformly and wholly by the area S**1** of the folded portion **1212**. Thus, it is possible to uniformly compress the contact part **1214** onto the first cylindrical terminal **22**.

In this embodiment, the elastic contact piece **121** includes the first curved portion **1215** acting as an elasticity changer. Thus, a curved degree of the elastic contact piece **121** is reduced at a position where the first curved portion **1215** is formed. On the contrary, the curved degree of the elastic contact piece **121** may be increased instead. An elastic contact piece **121***x* shown in FIGS. **24** and **25** includes a constricted portion **1217** acting as an elasticity changer. The constricted portion **1217** is formed by constricting both side edges of an area S**2** (in a direction from the first end **1211** of the elastic contact piece **121***x* to the folded part **1212**) in a shape of a rectangle. By forming the constricted portion **1217**, the constricted portion **1217** reduces a curved degree of the elastic contact piece **121** when the folded portion **1212** is lifted up by the raised portion **116** (See, FIG. **23**B.). Thus, the elastic contact piece **121** can be deformed at a position where the constricted portion **1217** is formed.

Thus, even if the folded portion **1212** is located at the same height as the raised portion **116**, since the elastic contact piece **121** is deformed, the first contact terminal **12** can be housed in the terminal space R**2** while keeping the shape of the folded portion **1212**.

Hereinbelow is explained how the lance **1224** acts when the first cylindrical terminal **12** is inserted into the terminal space R**2**.

The first contact terminal **12** is housed in the terminal space R**2**. As illustrated in FIGS. **23**A and **23**B, a first fitting hole R**2**A and a second fixing hole R**2**B are formed in the terminal space R**2**. The first fitting hole R**2**A is formed including: a floor R**21** facing the bottom wall **1221** of the first terminal body **122**; a ceiling R**22** facing the top wall **1222**; and sidewalls R**23** in FIGS. **26** and **27** facing the sidewalls **1223**. The second fixing hole R**2**B is located deeper than the first fitting hole R**2**A in a direction F**7** in which the first contact terminal **12** is inserted into the terminal space R**2**. The second fixing hole R**2**B is vertically longer than the first fitting hole R**2**A, and is horizontally longer than the first fitting hole R**2**A.

The first contact terminal **12** first enters the first fitting hole R**2**A. The lance **1224** standing up from the sidewalls **1223** of the first terminal body **122** are compressed by a pair of the sidewalls R**23** of the first fitting hole R**2**A facing each other, and thus, are kept deformed while the first contact terminal **12** is forwarding.

As illustrated in FIG. **27**, when the first contact terminal **12** passes over the sidewalls R**23** by which the lance **1224** is compressed, and arrives at the second fixing hole R**2**B, the lance **1224** is no longer compressed by the sidewalls R**23**, and hence, returns to an original form thereof. Thus, the lance **1224** gets wider than a gap between the first terminal body **122** and the sidewalls R**23**. Accordingly, even if the first contact terminal **12** is tried to be pulled out of the terminal space R**2**, the lance **1224** is caught by the sidewalls R**23**, and hence, the first contact terminal **12** is prevented from being pulled out of the terminal space R**2**.

The lance **1224** includes a projected portion **1224***c*. Between the sidewalls R**23** of the terminal space R**2** and the lance **1224** is formed gaps S**0** through which the second portions **1224***n* can pass.

For instance, when the first contact terminal **12** is inserted into the terminal space R**2**, if the lance **1224** is compressed at proximal ends thereof by the sidewalls R**23** of the terminal space R**2**, the lance **1224** is plastically deformed with the proximal ends thereof being closed, and accordingly, the lance **1224** cannot get wide. In such a condition, the first contact terminal **12** can be readily pulled out of the terminal space R**2**, if the cable C**1** is strongly pulled.

However, since the gaps S**0** through which the projected portions **1224***c* of the second slope portion **1224***n* can pass are formed between the sidewalls R**23** of the terminal space R**2** and the lance **1224**, there can be ensured a sufficient gap between the first terminal body **122** and the sidewalls R**23**.

The gaps S**0** causes the lance **1224** to contact the sidewalls R**23** at a point P**1** closer to an open end **1224***b* than a proximal

end **1224***a* of the second slope portion **1224***n*. The gaps S**0** formed between the first contact terminal **12** and the sidewalls R**23** are designed to allow the sidewalls R**23** to contact the lance **1224** at a point closer to the open end **1224***b* than a center of a full length of the lance **1224**.

Accordingly, it is possible to maintain an elastic force by which the compressed lance **1224** wants to return to an original form thereof to thereby prevent the open ends **1224***a* of the lance **1224** from being plastically deformed. Thus, the lance **1224** can be engaged to the sidewalls R**23** of the terminal space R**2** by a sufficient length, ensuring it possible to prevent the first contact terminal **12** from being pulled out of the terminal space R**2**, even if the first contact terminal **12** is pulled backwardly.

Thus, the first contact terminal **12** can be kept inserted in the terminal space R**2** of the outer housing **11**, ensuring high reliability to electrical connection between the first contact terminal **12** and the first cylindrical terminal **22**.

For instance, it is assumed that the lance **1224** is designed not to include the projected portion **1224***c*, and hence, the second slope portion **1224***n* inclines by a constant angle. If the lance **1224** is designed to be longer than the present one, the lance **1224** contacts the sidewalls R**23** of the terminal space R**23** at a location remoter from the first terminal body **122** when the sidewalls R**23** contact the proximal end of the lance **1224**. Thus, since a gap to be formed between the sidewalls R**23** of the terminal space R**2** and the first terminal body **122** can be wide, it is possible to prevent the sidewalls R**23** from abutting on the proximal end of the lance **1224**.

However, if the lance **1224** is designed to be longer, since the lance **1224** is housed in the second fixing hole R**2**B while contacting the sidewalls R**23** in the first fitting hole R**2**A, it is necessary to forward the first contact terminal **12** by a distance by which the lance **1224** is made longer. Thus, it is necessary to fabricate the second fixing hole R**2**B to be longer.

However, the projected portions **1224***c* of the lance **1224** is formed such that an inclination angle between the first terminal body **122** and the open ends **1224***b* is greater than an inclination angle between the first terminal body **122** and the proximal end **1224***a* in the first contact terminal **12**. Accordingly, even if gaps formed between the first terminal body **122** and the sidewalls R**23** are wide, it is possible for the projected portion **1224***c* of the lance **1224** to engage with the sidewalls R**23**, and hence, it is not necessary to design the second fixing hole R**2**B to be long.

The projected portion **1224***c* of the non-compressed lance **1224** slide on and are compressed by the sidewalls R**23** at an entrance to the terminal space R**23**. Each of the projected portions **1224***c* is formed such that a gap between each of the projection portions **1224***c* and each of the sidewalls **1223** is greater at a location closer to each of the open ends **1224***b*. Accordingly, as a location at which each of the sidewalls R**23** contacts the lance **1224** transfers towards each of the open ends **1224***b* as the first contact terminal **12** forwards into the terminal space R**2**, the lance **1224** can be gradually closed along the above-mentioned gap between each of the projections portion **1224***c* and each of the sidewalls **1223**. Thus, the first contact terminal **12** can be smoothly inserted into the terminal space R**2** without the lance **1224** being interfered with the sidewalls R**23**

Furthermore, since each of the projected portions **1224***c* is formed such that a gap between each of the projections portion **1224***c* and each of the sidewalls **1223** is greater at a location closer to each of the open ends **1224***b*, it is possible for the open ends **1224***b* of the projected portions **1224***c* to have an enhanced resistance against being compressed and/or collapsed. Accordingly, it is possible to prevent the projected portions **1224***c* from being deformed due to a compressive force increasing as the first contact terminal **12** forwards into the terminal space R**2**, exerted onto the lance **1224** by the sidewalls R**23**.

Furthermore, since the lance **1224** is formed by forming a cutting line around a part of the sidewall **1223** of the first terminal body **122**, and causing the part to outwardly stand, it is not necessary to attach any separate part to the first terminal body **122** for forming the lance **1224**. Thus, the lance **1224** can be readily fabricated.

The lance **1224** illustrated in FIGS. **27** and **28** is designed to include the projected portions **1224***c*. Instead of the projected portions **1224***c*, the lance **1224** may be designed to include folded portions formed by folding open end of the lance **1224**.

FIGS. **28** and **29** illustrate a lance **1224***x* including a folded portion formed by folding an open end of the lance, according to a first variant.

As illustrated in FIGS. **28** and **29**, the lance **1224***x* includes: a first slope portion **1224***m* extending at the proximal end **1224***a* from the first terminal body **122**; and a second slope portion **1224***n* constituted of a folded portion **1224***d* or a folded portion **1224***d* formed by outwardly folding a open end of the first portion **1224***n* into two layers stacking one on another. The lance **1224***x* is fabricated by forming a cut line around a portion of the sidewall **1223** of the first terminal body **122**, and causing the portion to stand relative to the sidewall **1223**.

Each of the folded portions **1224***d* is located outside of the first portions **1224***m* inclining relative to the sidewalls **1223** of the first terminal body **122**. Accordingly, it is possible to form such a gap S**0** between the first terminal body **122** of the first contact terminal **12***x* and each of the sidewalls R**23** that the sidewalls R**23** do not contact the proximal end **1224***a* of the lance **1224***x* when the first contact terminal **12***x* is inserted into the second fixing hole R**2**A.

In the first variant, the sidewalls R**23** contact the lance **1224***x* at locations closer to the open ends **1224***b* than a center of the lance **1224***x* when the first contact terminal **12***x* is inserted into the terminal space R**2**. In FIG. **28**, the sidewalls R**23** contact the second portions **1224***n* of the lance **1224***x*. Accordingly, it is possible to maintain an elastic force by which the compressed lance **1224***x* wants to return to the original form thereof to thereby prevent the first contact terminal **12***x* from being pulled out of the terminal space R**2**, even if the first contact terminal **12***x* is pulled backwardly.

The folded portions **1224***d* make it possible for the lance **1224***x* to contact the sidewalls R**23** at a location outside than an inclination angle of the first portions **1224***m*. Thus, even if the gaps S**0** are formed wide, the lance **1224***x* can be engaged to the sidewalls R**23** while the second fixing hole R**2**B is not fabricated longer.

Since the open end **1224***b* of the lance **1224***x* is outwardly folded to form the folded portions **1224***d*, end surfaces **1224***e* of the folded portions **1224***d* face end surfaces R**23***a* of the sidewalls R**23** to each other. On each of the end surfaces R**23***a*, an inclined surface R**23***b* for enlarging open ends of the sidewalls R**23** is formed. Accordingly, it is possible to insert the lance **1224***x* into the first fitting hole R**2**A having a gradually reducing space therebetween while the folded portions **1224***d* slides on the inclined surfaces R**23***b*.

In FIGS. **28** and **29**, the inclines surfaces R**23***b* are formed on the sidewalls R**23**. Alternatively, the inclines surfaces R**23***b* may be formed on the end surfaces **1224***e* instead.

FIGS. **30** and **31** illustrate a lance **1224***y* according to a second variant. In the second variant, an inclining portion is formed by folding an open end of a lance of a contact terminal.

As illustrated in FIGS. **30** and **31**, the lance **1224***y* includes: a first slope portion **1224***m* extending from the proximal end **1224***a*; and a second slope portion **1224***n* possessing an slope **1224***f* formed by outwardly bending the open end **1224***b*.

The slope **1224***f* formed by outwardly bending the open end **1224***b* is located outside than an inclination angle of the first portion **122***m*. Accordingly, it is possible to form such a gap S**0** between the first terminal body **122** of the first contact terminal **12***y* and each of the sidewalls R**23** that the sidewalls R**23** do not contact the proximal end **1224***a* of the lance **1224***y* when the first contact terminal **12***y* is inserted into the second fixing hole R**2**A.

In the second variant, similarly to the first variant, the sidewalls R**23** contact the lance **1224***y* at locations closer to the open ends **1224***b* than a center of the lance **1224***y* when the first contact terminal **12***y* is inserted into the terminal space R**2**. In FIG. **30**, the sidewalls R**23** contact the second portions **1224***n* of the lance **1224***y*. Accordingly, it is possible to maintain an elastic force by which the compressed lance **1224***y* wants to return to an original form thereof to thereby prevent the first contact terminal **12***y* from being pulled out of the terminal space R**2**, even if the first contact terminal **12***y* is pulled backwardly.

Furthermore, the slopes **1224***f* make it possible for the lance **1224***y* to contact the sidewalls R**23** at a location outside than an inclination angle of the first portions **1224***m*. Thus, even if the gaps S**0** are formed wide, the lance **1224***y* can be engaged to the sidewalls R**23** while the second fixing hole R**2**B is not fabricated longer.

In the present embodiment, the first and second housings are defined as the outer and inner housing **11** and **21**, respectively. Alternatively, the first and second housings are defined as the inner and outer housing **21** and **11**, respectively.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

The electrical connector according to the present invention can be used as a connector equipped in a glow plug, a connector for connecting a combustion pressure sensor and a wire harness to each other, a connector for connecting cables to each other, a connector equipped in various electric/electronic devices, and a connector equipped in an automobile. The electrical connector according to the present invention can be employed broadly in fields such as an electric/electronic industry and an automobile industry.

While the present invention has been described in connection with certain preferred embodiments, it is to be understood that the subject matter encompassed by way of the present invention is not to be limited to those specific embodiments. On the contrary, it is intended for the subject matter of the invention to include all alternatives, modifications and equivalents as can be included within the spirit and scope of the following claims.

The entire disclosures of Japanese Patent Applications No. 2014-252494 filed on Dec. 12, 2014 including specification, claims, drawings and summary are incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

What is claimed is:

1. A connector terminal, comprising:
- a terminal body operable to be inserted into a terminal space formed in a housing; and
- an elastic contact piece arranged in the terminal body,
- the terminal body including:
  - a bottom wall possessing a first opening; and
  - a top wall facing the bottom wall away therefrom,
- wherein:
- the elastic contact piece includes:
  - a first end fixed to the bottom wall;
  - a second end abutting on the top wall and being a free end; and
  - a substantially U-shaped folded portion located between the first and the second end;
- the terminal space includes a raised portion having a height from the bottom wall towards the top wall; and
- when the terminal body is inserted into the terminal space, the folded portion runs onto the raised portion, a part of the elastic contact piece moves out of the first opening, and the second end abuts on the bottom wall.

2. The connector terminal as defined in claim **1**, wherein:
- the elastic contact piece further includes
  - an angle changer changing an angle by which the elastic contact piece is bent between the first end and the folded portion; and
- a first direction in which the elastic contact piece extends between the first end and the angle changer differs from a second direction in which the elastic contact piece extends between the angle changer and the folded portion from each other.

3. The connector terminal as defined in claim **2**, wherein the angle changer is constituted of a curved portion directing the folded portion to the bottom wall.

4. The connector terminal as defined in claim **2**, wherein:
- a first portion of the elastic contact piece between the first end and the angle changer inclines toward the top wall; and
- a second portion of the elastic contact piece between the angle changer and the folded portion inclines toward the bottom wall.

5. The connector terminal as defined in claim **4**, wherein:
- the top wall possesses a second opening; and
- a part of the folded portion outwardly projects from the terminal body through the second opening.

6. The connector terminal as defined in claim **2**, wherein the angle changer is constituted of an area having a width smaller than the remainder of the elastic contact piece.

7. The connector terminal as defined in claim **1**, wherein:
- the elastic contact piece includes a curved portion forming a convex from the top wall to the bottom wall;
- the second end is continuous to the curved portion; and
- when the folded portion runs onto the raised portion, not the second end but the curved portion abuts on the bottom wall.

8. The connector terminal as defined in claim **1**, wherein:
- the elastic contact piece extends in an axial direction of a cylindrical terminal contacting therewith; and
- the part of the elastic contact piece possesses an arc outer surface along a peripheral surface of the cylindrical terminal.

9. The connector terminal as defined in claim **8**, wherein:
- a plurality of projections extending in an axial direction of the cylindrical terminal are formed on an outer surface of the part of the elastic contact piece; and
- the plurality of projections are arranged in a peripheral direction of the cylindrical terminal.

10. The connector terminal as defined in claim **1**, wherein:
- the raised portion includes:
  - a slope inclining from the bottom wall to the top wall; and
  - a horizontal portion continuous with a top of the slope; and

the folded portion runs onto the horizontal portion such that a part of the folded portion contacts a surface of the horizontal portion.

* * * * *